

Unraveling Lalava: Uncovering the Cultural Knowledge Embodied in Lalava

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An exegesis submitted to Auckland University of
Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Design

2020

School of Art & Design
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*Fig 1.1. Latu. Vena. Lalava Fence Kupesi.
Designed after the Kalou Kupesi. 2019*





Abstract

Unravelling lalava is a metaphoric expression I use as a means of uncovering the Tongan cultural knowledge embodied in lalava. The research project undertakes an auto-ethnographic approach as I intend to seek a cultural understanding as a means of unravelling a sense of Tongan identity. Lalava is almost unknown amongst the younger generations of Polynesians, especially those living outside of the Pacific Islands. Therefore this project aims to share this new-found knowledge with my community or those like me who are interested in discovering a sense of cultural identity through art.

Fig 1.2. Latu, Vena. Lalava Fence Kupesi. Designed after the Tokelau Feletoa and Amoamokofe Kupesi. 2019

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I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Acknowledgement

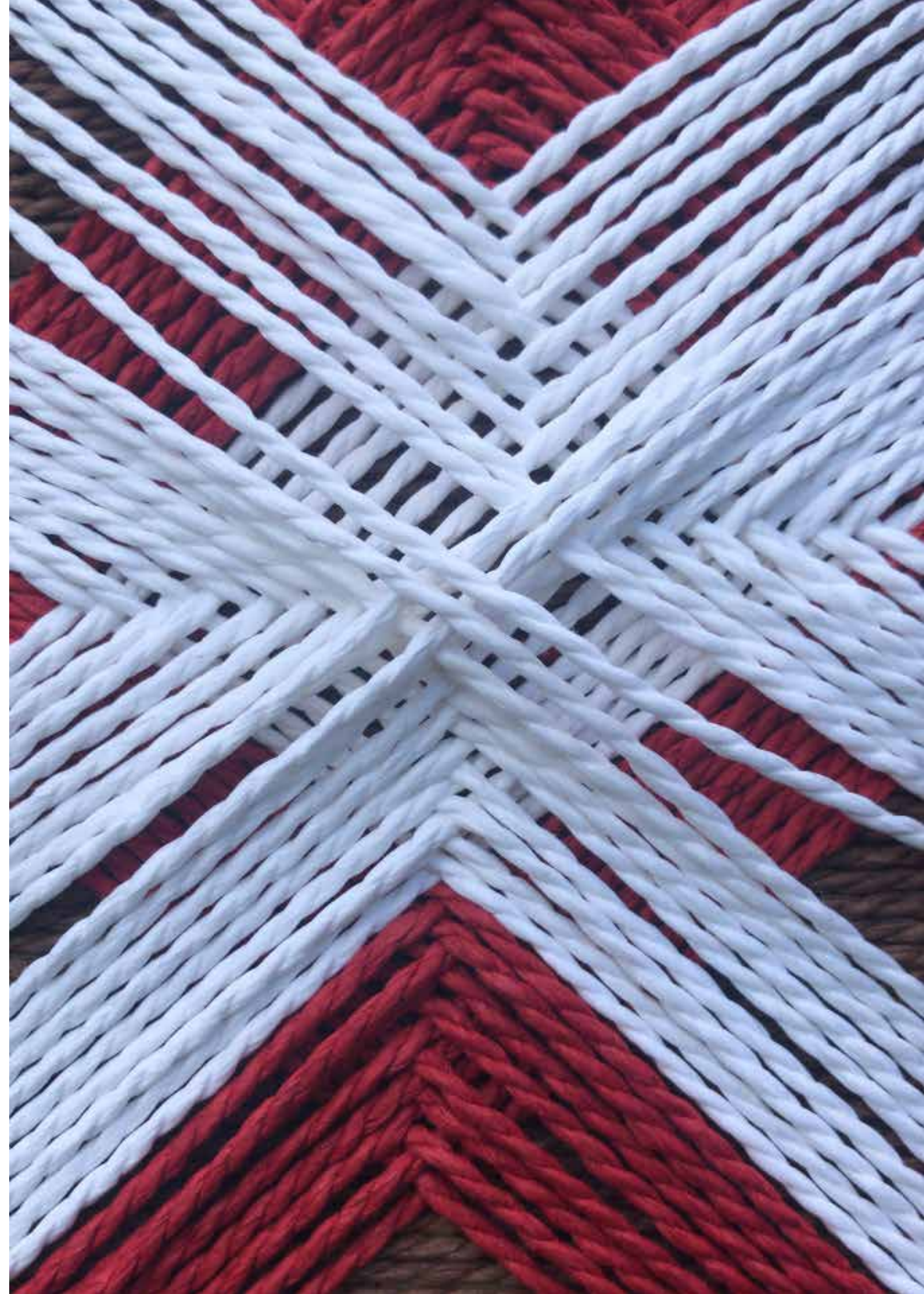
Firstly, I would like to say thank you to my supervisors Rachel Carley and Nooroa Tapuni for their patience and guidance throughout this research journey. The support and advice you both have given me throughout our meetings have motivated me to keep pushing forward especially in times where I felt like giving up.

Thank you to Layne Waerea for taking the time out of her day to help me out and sharing your knowledge and experiences with me. Without your help I probably would have lost my mind.

To my family in Tonga, especially, Paul Fifita and Sela Fifita, thank you for taking me in when I visited and taking me to places that benefited in this research project.

And lastly to my parents, no words can describe how much I appreciate you both, your stories are what inspired this research project and because of that, I have been able to uncover a sense of cultural identity.

Fig 1.4. Latu, Vena. Lalava Fence Kupesi. 2019



Introduction

I was born and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand, where I spent most of my life growing up in South Auckland. For my parents, it was their home away from home as they had grown up in Tonga. My parents used to tell my siblings and me stories about their birthplace, how they grew up, the village that raised them, the environment and the people. I loved hearing these stories then, and I still do today. The stories were like fairy tales where I used to imagine a ‘young’ me growing up alongside my parents in their home villages, and I sometimes wonder how different life would have been if I was homegrown in Tonga. Stories of Tonga included exaggerated myths and legends such as the Oceanian athlete who was so strong that he threw his javelin so far that it was said to have disappeared into the night sky.¹ These tales revealed an insight that is much deeper than the spoken language, unravelling an indigenous way of thinking that has been passed down through our genealogy – viewing the world metaphorically, a world where the art of communication came in many forms.

I visited Tonga for the first time in July this year (2019). Hearing stories of Tonga was one thing but experiencing it was another. As a person of Tongan descent, I had always felt lost when it came to my Tongan cultural identity, or I felt unaccepted by the Tongan community. As much as I studied the culture, there was still a sense of feeling like an outsider from my people – labelled as a ‘plastic islander.’² As I had never learned how to speak the Tongan language and I was never interested in taking part in any Tongan faiva (performing arts), these judgements had never affected me but I did find it interesting in the sense of experiencing Tongan culture from the comfort of my own home in Aotearoa.

Three years ago, as a second-year spatial design student, my lecturer Albert Refiti introduced me to the ancient Tongan art of lalava. This art form is a lashing of two lines of kafa (sennit), a braided rope made from the inner fibres of coconut husks; the lines intersect one another repeatedly, circling up and down to form geometric patterns as it binds and connects two or more beings and objects.³ Before the introduction of Western tools and building resources, ancient Tongans developed lalava (figure 2) as a means to make their own tools and to bind structures such as the fale (home) and vaka (canoe). Lalava is an art that represents a way of life.

To gain a better understanding of this cultural art form, I looked into the artwork and teachings of Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi, a tufunga lalava (master in the ancient art of lalava). For many, the artistic practice of Filipe Tohi is based on his lalava-ology:⁴

“Tohi considers the movement of binding and lashing lalava as a means of appreciating a Pacific language that reflects a philosophy of life, as the patterns imply an insight into the equilibrium of our Tongan ancestors’ daily lives through metaphorical and physical connections with cultural knowledge.”⁵

Through his creative process, Tohi indicates relationships with social, philosophical, navigational, and ecological methods of knowledge in his artistic practice. His work, therefore, speaks not only of his Tongan country but also of his migration and living in New Zealand. By reimagining these indigenous forms into abstract works of art, Filipe Tohi allows us to understand the Tongan experiences of the past in a contemporary context.

As a spatial designer of Tongan descent, I have used an auto-ethnographic approach for this research project as it is a personal journey through which I seek to find myself as a Tongan, metaphorically unravelling the Tongan cultural knowledge embodied in lalava. The importance of discovering my Tongan cultural identity is not to please those who labelled me a ‘plastic islander’ but to bridge⁶ the paths of my two cultural characters – the narratives of my Tongan heritage and the stories of my upbringing in Aotearoa. Learning and understanding the cultural knowledge and descriptions embodied in lalava are the main focus of this research. Lalava is an overlooked craft in terms of its contribution to Tongan history. There is a limited amount of academic literature on lalava, and knowledge on this heritage art can mainly be gained through observation of the work as well as by means of talanoa.⁷

1 Epeli Hau’ofa. “Our Sea of Islands,” in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, eds. Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau’ofa (Suva, Fiji: School of Social and Economic Development, The University of the South Pacific, 1993), 7.

2 ‘Plastic islander’ – a label put on people who are of Polynesian descent but do not sound or act like an islander. Usually aimed towards people born and raised outside of the Pacific Islands.

3 Karen Stevenson, “Lalava-ology: A Pacific Aesthetic,” in *Filipe Tohi: Genealogy of Lines—Ho-hoko e Tohitohi*, eds. Filipe Tohi, Simon Rees, and Gregory Burke (New Plymouth, New Zealand: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2002), 17.

4 Karen Stevenson, *Filipe Tohi: Journey to the Present: Makahoko mei Lotokafa* (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific Press, 2015), 1.

5 “Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi.” *Tautai: Guiding Pacific Arts*. <http://www.tautai.org/artist/sopolemalama-filipe-tohi/>.

6 The term ‘to bridge’ is a contemporary metaphor for making a connection.

7 ‘Talanoa’ is the Tongan translation for verbal interaction. Timote Vaoleteti, “Talanoa: Differentiating the Talanoa Research Methodology from Phenomenology, Narrative, Kaupapa Maori and Feminist Methodologies,” *Te Reo* 56/57 (2013).

In Chapter One (Contextual Review), I set out to navigate the cultural identity that was established by ancient Polynesians as they bonded together to thrash out an approach to life that has been passed down through generations. Ancient art like lalava spoke a philosophical language of art that links ancient Tongans and Polynesians to the sea – defining a way of life according to the ocean.

Chapter Two introduces the methodological positioning of my research, highlighting the auto-ethnographic and practice-based research methodologies I have explored, in addition to their associated methods. The methods section is an indication of how I have brought the narrative of this journey into physical form – using metaphors as the foundation for the outcome.

Chapter Three outlines the analysis of practice by going into detail on how these methods and methodologies guide the research project, indicating development of the creative thinking interpreting this research journey into a spatial context. It also provides a site analysis and explains how the site plays a role in influencing the project outcome.

Through these explorations, interpretations and narratives, I hope to become more intertwined with my cultural identity and link my two cultures through the work of a spatial designer. While lalava is almost an unknown art amongst the younger generations of Tongans and Polynesian people, it is, however, a mnemonic device that carries cultural knowledge developed by our ancestors. As a spatial designer, I hope to uncover this knowledge and share it with my community.

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“According to Tohi, these patterns have been modelled into symbols of human interaction. The designs tell us/teach us how to live/to interact/to be.”⁸

The cultural knowledge established by ancient Tongans and Polynesians dates back to the times where they would navigate using their environment as a guide as they would voyage across the vast Pacific Ocean in the hopes of finding land. Before I search for my Tongan cultural identity, I must unravel an understanding of how my ancestors viewed their world and how they interpreted this knowledge into art. This chapter speaks of what my encounter with Tongan culture was before I embarked on this research and how it has influenced the growth of my experience in terms of Pacific culture. By referring the teachings to lalava, I can uncover what it is I am looking for and how I can embed this new-found knowledge into my creative process as a spatial designer. In particular, the work and cultural understandings of Filipe Tohi with lalava are examined as a means of unravelling this cultural knowledge through the use of metaphors and seeing the unseen through the seen. The exaggeration of metaphors and social networks is an essential part of understanding how ancient Tongans and Polynesians approached daily life before the introduction of Western technology.

When first introduced to lalava, I had no clue as to what it was, just another Tongan word foreign to me. Albert Refiti gave me a brief overview of lalava and recommended Filipe Tohi as an artist that had mastered this ancient Tongan art. Tohi himself explained that understanding lalava patterns is like trying to understand the past.⁹ From Tohi’s teachings through his artwork, I was able to realise that lalava was more than a technique used for construction, that it also represented a way of life. In an interview with Hilary Scothorn, Filipe Tohi noted that lalava patterns are designed after aspects of the ocean from the currents to the fishes.¹⁰ The Pacific Ocean has a significant influence on Polynesian culture, both past and present, as it symbolises a shared identity that connects the Pacific islands. It is the ocean which connects the Pacific countries through its waves just as it is the kafa that lashes and binds. “Our ancestors, who had lived in the Pacific for over 2000 years, viewed their world as a ‘sea of islands’, rather than ‘islands in the sea.’”¹¹ Polynesian people live a life that is intertwined with the water as it is a representation of the beginning and identity.

“The term lalava is made up of two words, lala and va, [...] To lala is to intersect two, the interaction of two or more imaginary lines.”¹² The term lala gives an insight into the Tongan ancestors’ abstract way of thinking in terms of its combination of art and language. Lalava brings the ‘interaction of two imaginary lines’ into physical form as the kafa represents these two lines – through the process of lashing, the lines intersect with one another forming the geometric patterns as it binds onto the structural material. Filipe Tohi describes the patterns of lalava as vessels of cultural knowledge and history that connect past, present and future¹³ where the kafa are the lines that represent genealogy¹⁴ that makes these connections. My interpretation of this is that the motion of lala creates these metaphors as the point of intersection symbolising the forming of these relationships that connect past and present. The genealogy that lashes and binds lalava is the linking of past, present and future as each line that forms the patterns represents a different generation.

⁹ Karen Stevenson, “Encounters with the Past,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 21 (2009): 140.

¹⁰ Filipe Tohi and Hilary Scothorn, “An Artist’s Perspective, 2,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 21 (2009).

¹¹ Hau’ofa, 7.

¹² Okusitino Mahina, “Tufunga Lalava,” In *Filipe Tohi: Genealogy of Lines—Hohoko e Tohitohi*, eds. Filipe Tohi, Simon Rees, and Gregory Burke (New Plymouth, New Zealand: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2002), 7.

¹³ Nina Kinahoi Tonga and Helen Kedgley, *Tonga ‘i Onopooni (Porirua, New Zealand: Pataka Art + Museum, 2014)*, 8.

¹⁴ “Lalava Residency.” *The University of Auckland*. <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/on-campus/life-on-campus/pacific-life/fale-pasifika/lalava-residency.html>

⁸ Karen Stevenson, “Threads of the Island, Threads of the Urban,” *Kunapipi* 25, no. 2 (2005): 177-181.

Vā, the last syllable of lalava, is a general term within the Polynesian language that has been used to describe the space between things or people. Tonga, Samoa, Tahiti and Rotuma use the term vā whereas New Zealand and Hawaii it is referred to as wā.¹⁵ Tevita Kai’li goes into specific details on how this works when the term vā is formed as the root word to emphasise the different spaces in between – where the vast ocean (and space) between islands translates to vaha or vahanoa.¹⁶ Communicating with friends and families in another country occurs through media that involve the internet – a space Kai’il refers to as vahaope.¹⁷

The term vā, however, should not be confused with the western terminology of ‘open space’ – as it is more a term to describe the physical aspect of vā (vaha/ vahanoa).¹⁸ Vā is the space that relates and links two or more things or people together – a socio-spatial term Kai’li describes whereby physical space is formed through social interaction. When lala and vā are together, lalava translates to the intersection of space. When lalava is used to build the vaka and later it sets out on the sea, the vaka then intersects the space between the celestial body and sea as ancient navigators utilise the areas outside of the vā to navigate. The concept of vā has enabled me to think about how I can design this research project through the cultural and socio-spatial aspects of space, playing with the idea of linking and relating two or more in terms of space, social encounters, past and present.

15 Tevita O. Kai’li, “Tauhi va: Nurturing Tongan sociospatial ties in Maui and beyond.” *The Contemporary Pacific* 17, no. 1 (2005): 89.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

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Fig 3.1. Lalava by Filipe Tohi. Humu Pattern Named after the Trigger Fish Essential for navigating and sailing. 2004. Retrieved from <http://www.lalava.net/index.php/ct-menu-item-17#1>

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Fig 3.2. Lalava by Filipe Tohi. Manulua Pattern translated as twobirds but also refers to the emerging of a new flower. 2004. Retrieved from <http://www.lalava.net/index.php/ct-menu-item-17#1>

The earliest narratives of Pacific history are about ancient Polynesians using navigational methods to voyage across the vast Pacific Ocean on their vaka. The navigational methods they employed would contribute to a way of metaphorically viewing the world. Methods for navigation came in many forms such as the reading of the stars, observing the directions of birds' flight, the position of the sun, feeling the directional course provided by the winds and ocean swells.¹⁹ The approach to these navigational techniques is similar to how modern Polynesian artists approach their creative process by means of metaphors. "Pacific art is an understanding of the invisible through the visible, gaining a philosophical understanding of cultural knowledge through the seen and unseen."²⁰

Tohi has noted that lalava patterns are designed after different aspects of the environment with symbols such as the movements of the currents and fishes (figure 3.1) and birds (figures 3.2 & 3.3).²¹ When observing the lalava lashings (figure 2) made by Filipe Tohi at the Fale Pasifika (figure 5) of the University of Auckland, 2004, what can be seen by the naked eye is a repetition of diamond shape patterns or, in Tongan, the kupesi. The kupesi is a pattern similar to the lalava patterns that is traditionally drawn on to the ngatu and is designed to represent the birds and fishes. Through his own eyes, Tohi can make out these symbols through the approach of understanding the seen and unseen (figure 4.1). For his manulele (running bird) sculpture, Tohi undertakes a specific process whereby he draws the geometric shapes of lalava, which then create a net-like texture.²² Tohi states that thousands of designs arise from these patterns as he visualises the manulele and outlines its form (figures 4.2 & 4.3).²³ This metaphoric language has contributed to a way of thinking about spatial design for me in terms of a creative approach as well as constructing a programme for this research project that allows the viewer to unravel the hidden knowledge.

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19 Pamela Chan Siok Pheng et al. "The Lionhearts of the Pacific: Polynesians – Culture, History and Navigation," Topslide.net. <https://topslide.net/document/the-lionhearts-of-the-pacific-polynesians>: 27.

20 Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "Hawaiian Art and Society: Traditions and Transformations," In *Transformations of Polynesian Culture*, eds. Antony Hooper and Judith Huntsman (Auckland, New Zealand: Polynesian Society, 1985), 120.

21 Karen Stevenson, "Encounters with the Past," 140.

22 Karen Stevenson, Karen. "Threads of the Island, Threads of the Urban," 81.

23 Ibid.

Fig 3.3. Lalava by Filipe Tohi. Manulua. Two Birds. 2004.
Retrieved from <http://www.lalava.net/index.php/ct-menu-item-17#1>

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Fig 4.1. Two dimensional drawing of lalava patterns with manulele design formed. 2007. Retrieved from Stevenson, K. (2015). *Filipe Tohi: Journey to the present*, Makahoko mei lotokafa, University of the South Pacific Press, 2015: 81

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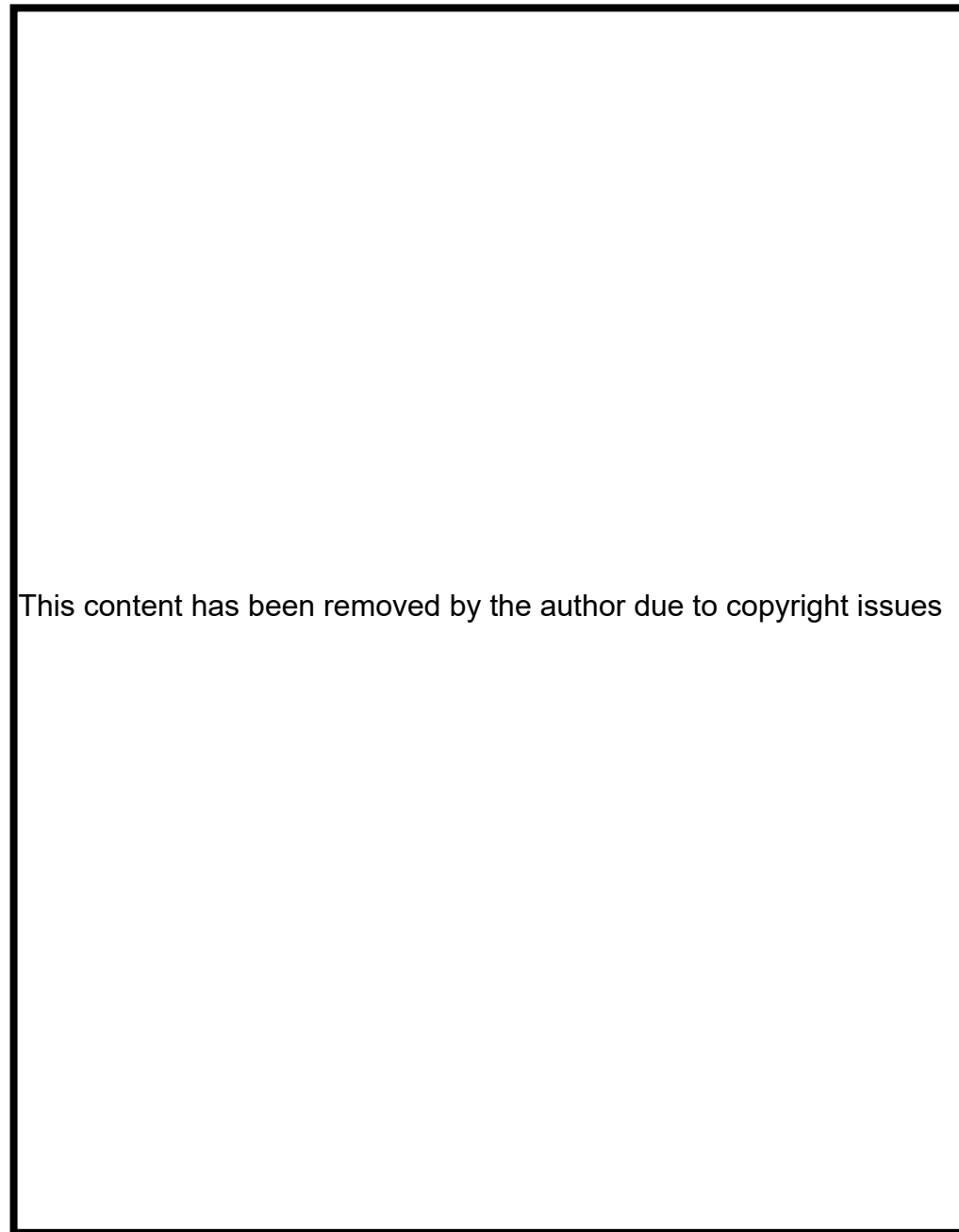
Fig 4.2. Digital Fabrication of Manulele Sculpture. 2007. Stevenson, K. (2015). *Filipe Tohi: Journey to the present*, Makahoko mei lotokafa, University of the South Pacific Press, 2015: 82

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Fig 4.3. Manulele lalava sculpture. 2007. Stevenson, K. (2015). *Filipe Tohi: Journey to the present*, Makahoko mei lotokafa, University of the South Pacific Press, 2015: 80

Fig 5. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. The Fale Pasifika, University of Auckland. 2019





For ancient Polynesians, seeing the unseen was essential in the sense that it gave an understanding of how to read the guiding stars that connected them to land. Mahina noted that “The celestial bodies in the sky, or outer space, or vava, were treated as kōhi Velenga, where the points of spatial intersection of imaginary lines from the actual stars, and galaxies of value to navigation and voyaging.”²⁴ Ancient navigators would connect the stars through invisible lines sailing towards that direction to the point of intersection (island) between stars and voyagers. The connection of stars through imaginary lines has been practised for centuries as people would use the constellations to ‘see’ images in the night sky that also led to the formation of stories. For me, the constellation of the Southern Cross was the most interesting as it is an iconic set of stars within Oceania and a guide for voyaging Polynesians. Frans-Karel Weener has noted that the Tongan people refer to the Southern Cross as toloa (wild duck, figure 6), as its formation looked similar to that of a duck flying towards the south.²⁵ When I think now of the stories my parents used to tell me as a child, I can almost imagine how my parents would tell this story: not that the Southern Cross guided our ancestors across the ocean to find land, but that it was toloa that guided them. Navigational methods and techniques were interpreted into lalava patterns which can also be seen on the “traditional tattoo, barkcloth, plaiting on Lapita ware; indicating that these patterns are than aesthetics but integrally entwined with Pacific lives and culture.”²⁶

Fig 6. Toloa (Wild duck) is the Southern Cross Constellation. It is seen by the Tongans as a flying bird. 2007. Retrieved from “Tongan club iconography: An attempt to unravel visual metaphors through myth.” *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*: 457

24 Mahina, 6.

25 Frans-Karel Weener, “Tongan Club Iconography: An Attempt to Unravel Visual Metaphors Through Myth.” *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 116, no. 4 (2007): 457.

26 Karen Stevenson, “Lalava-ology: A Pacific Aesthetic,” 17.

As a Tongan-New Zealander, I never questioned my cultural identity. I identified myself as a Tongan, and my home is Aotearoa, but in saying that, my cultural identity consistently was challenged by the Tongan community and other family members. In this research project, I will further discuss 'the Tongan way' through cultural art and Tongan words. Growing up, people within the Tongan community used to tell me that I'm either not Tongan enough or not Tongan at all because I did not do things that suited their criteria for being 'a Tongan.' I am Tongan, but I am also a product of my environment – as I reflect on my parents' stories, I know full well that Tonga is not New Zealand. There are many more things I have been criticised for in terms of cultural identity, but that did not mean that I did not love my culture; I may not fit people's definition of what a Tongan sounds like or acts like, and that is okay with me. This research project is my journey as a spatial designer uncovering the cultural knowledge embodied in lalava to gain a better understanding of the cultural narrative that surrounds it.

The Pacific Ocean is home to some of the smallest and most isolated islands in the world. Ancient Polynesians who lived in the Pacific Ocean for "thousands of years"²⁷ before the arrival of Continental people were able to survive by creating materials and tools by utilising the resources that were provided by the islands and ocean. One of the most versatile materials to come out of the Pacific is the kafa (sennit, figure 7) for its essential use of connecting two or more things.

"The kafa is made from the coconut husk after it is baked in an umu (underground oven) and then soaked in water for days before separating. The husk fibres are then dried under the tropical sun before braiding and rolling the threads on the desired surface (person's thigh or the ground) before being plaited."²⁸

The kafa is an ancient material, the use of which was passed down from our ancestors as it was an essential tool for building and one that pre-dated hammers and nails. I aim to establish a link with my ancestors in my own community in South Auckland, in areas where a lot of people of Pacific descent reside. As a spatial designer, this research into cultural contexts has driven me to consider how I can create a socio-spatial link to the Pacific for my own community in Māngere.



Fig 7. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Traditional Kafa. 2019

²⁷ Hau'ofa, 7.

²⁸ The making of kafa/sennit/magimagi is described in "Magimagi (Coconut Fibre)," Museum of New Zealand: Te Papa Tongarewa, <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/topic/1116>

According to Dr Okusitino Mahina, “Tongan art can be divided into two types: performance and material art. The performance art is called faiva, and material art is called tufunga.”²⁹ Growing up in Aotearoa, I was able to experience Tongan art at events like Polyfest and big Tongan weddings and birthdays. I recall observing my mother, my aunties, and other family members gathering together as they prepared the ngatu (tapa cloth or bark cloth). For me as a child, I defined culture as something I could see – the faiva, the ngatu, and the food.

At important celebratory events such as weddings and twenty-first birthdays, families will have their kids performs a dance – most commonly, it is the daughter who takes this duty in which they present a ‘tau’olunga.’³⁰ As the tau’olunga (figure 8) takes place, the performer is usually joined on stage by family members to put money on her skin and to dance along in the background. The money is a reward for the girl, unless, as often is the case, the money is collected for a fundraising event. The ngatu, on the other hand, is usually gifted to the celebrated couple or person – it is a Tongan saying that “you are regarded as poor, no matter how much money you have if you cannot gift a tapa cloth to the celebrated person.”³¹

The tufunga (material art) in my opinion is more of a hidden aspect of Tongan culture amongst the modern generation, as techniques for making crafts are less well-known within the younger generation of the Tongan community. In an interview with Karen Stevenson, Filipe Tohi talks about a particular basket with black and red manulua patterns on the lid. These patterns, Tohi says, are not being recreated as the people with the knowledge of the craft have all passed away – taking this knowledge with them and without passing it onto the next generation.³²

For me, the experience of lalava tufunga is a phenomenological experience in which I have viewed the movements of lashing and binding as an act of faiva. In this design research, I intend to tell a story of my cultural journey as a spatial designer by combining this ancient art of the past with present-day methods of designing such as the development from drawing to model making and the use of digital fabrication. I want to utilise the characteristics of lalava to uncover spatial possibilities and to present the cultural knowledge of ancient Tongans and Polynesians to my community.

29 Mahina, 5.

30 ‘Tau’olunga’ is a traditional Tongan dance that are traditionally performed by virgin girls. In the past it was performed by the chief’s daughters as a means of finding a suitor.

31 A saying I was told by my mother.

32 Stevenson, “Encounters with the past,” 143.



Fig 8. Taumoeanga, Rose. Videography. Screenshots of Seionala Latu’s ‘Tau’olunga.’ 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V13sQkZ2n4g>

Methodological Statement

Lalava is an ancient technique that came from a time in which ancient Tongans were yet to possess any form of written language – knowledge was transmitted by means of art-making and talanoa, through performances, stories and symbols.³³ According to Filipe Tohi, lalava patterns with their variations give insights into the history of Pacific people and the environment in which they lived.³⁴ Talanoa is the Tongan word for ‘talking’ or ‘conversation’ but when put into a Tongan cultural context it is more than that. According to Dr Timote Vaioleti, talanoa as a research methodology is an ethnographic means of communication between two people where all facets of a verbal discussion are part of a method of gathering data or information, be it in a formal or informal setting.³⁵ While in practice talanoa can strongly influence the space surrounding the participants depending on the emotion of the verbal interaction, as talanoa is culturally centred, it is an ethnographic approach because, according to Gjoko Muratovski, “ethnography allows the researcher to study various cultural practices that occur in practical societies that are of interest.”³⁶ Talanoa is a part of everyday life – we see it every day; this allows me to not only observe this methodology from an ethnographic perspective and its influence on space through personality, but also on a regular basis.

33 Vaioleti, 196.

34 “Lalava Residency.”

35 Vaioleti, 193-194.

36 Gjoko Muratovski, *Research for Designers: A Guide to Methods and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2016), 56.



Fig 9. Aualiitia, Don. Videography. Vena Latu imitating the movements of lalava lashing in the form of a 'tau'olunga.' 2019

In addition to talanoa, I have utilised a practice-based methodology that highlights a Pacific approach to the 'performance of the craft.' By applying the art of faiva onto tufunga, I undertake an auto-ethnographic method that comprises of visual and material cultural research and phenomenology as I attempt to uncover the narratives that go into lalava-making. Adrienne L. Kaeppler noted that "few Tongans are familiar with the traditional objects of art and material culture that are no longer made or used."³⁷ As a spatial designer, I experiment with materials as a means of understanding what already exists. As Ian Woodward noted, in studying culture through material objects, we can better understand social structures and social difference as well as human action, emotion, and meaning.³⁸ This project focuses on the motion of making with materials as a means of gaining an understanding of my ancestors and their "perspectives and views of social realities."³⁹ The faiva focuses on the body movements; from what I have observed from my sister's practice of the tau'olunga (figure 8), her hand movements interpret the meaning of the selected songs with the head and eyes directed at the celebrated guest as well as in synchrony with movements of the hands. Without the kafa, I mimed the actions of lalava-making (figure 9) the same way that my sister performed her tau'olunga in an attempt to see if these movements can translate to faiva. The experiences gained from this practice-based research has enable me to develop a way of thinking about how I interpret the space around me through lalava, unravelling new ideas about how to reimagine it in a contemporary spatial context.

37 Adrienne L. Kaeppler, *From the Stone Age to the Space Age in 200 Years: Tongan Art and Society on the Eve of the Millennium* (Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Tongan National Museum, 1999).

38 Ian Woodward, *Ian. Understanding Material Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 4.

39 Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (New York: Pearson, 2010): 108.

I used line drawing as a starting point to analyse the patterns found in lalava as a means of unravelling spatial and structural forms – navigating a threshold of movement through drawing. Architect Juhani Pallasma described the art of drawing as a fluent connection between hand, eye, and mind where the pencil is like a bridge between two realities.⁴⁰ The process of the line drawing does not initially focus on the lines themselves but more on what they make, contemporarily visualising space from within, navigating my way around the image as I metaphorically place myself in the position of the pencil.

Interpreting lalava patterns into drawing and making has enabled me to form objects (figure 10.2) and my environment into lalava patterns visually. These visions would appear in the comfort of my home and studio space and while I was navigating around Auckland in my vaka (my van) and walking. Lalava was used to create tools; this inspired how I reimagined everyday objects we rely on today such as bags (figure 11.1), toys (figure 11.2), and footwear (figure 11.3 & 11.4). My navigational methods are a lot simpler than those of my ancestors as I rely on directional signs and street names, thus creating a visual map in my mind. Visualising aspects of my surroundings as lalava felt similar to the process of pencil drawing in terms of navigating through the intensity of the threshold. Navigating around Auckland, I drove under bridges and into tunnels. I developed a propensity to see lalava everywhere, such as the formwork patterns embedded in these concrete structures and other pieces of urban infrastructure, visualising these forms into geometric shapes (figure 23). The multicultural fale (figure 12.1) at Walmsley Park in Mt. Roskill (figure 12.2) was my first encounter with lalava in a spatial context. This contemporary interpretation of lalava within a spatial context inspired the reimaginings of my encounters while driving into drawing (figure 22) and model making, both hand-craft and digital. Translating driving and observation onto the drawing and crafting as a method is utilised to document my visualisation of the ‘unseen’ through my reimagination of the ‘seen,’ uncovering a spatial experience between the imaginary and reality.

Driving as a method also resulted in field research, navigating sites and communities that reflect the characteristics of lalava and who will benefit from this cultural knowledge most. Field research has taken place in both Auckland and Tonga as a means of comparing and contrasting cultural differences and similarities through space and social interactions. The experiences I gained in Tonga, as well as the community observation of my site analysis, are documented through photography and videography – capturing both cultural and social interactions amongst my community.

⁴⁰ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2009), 60.

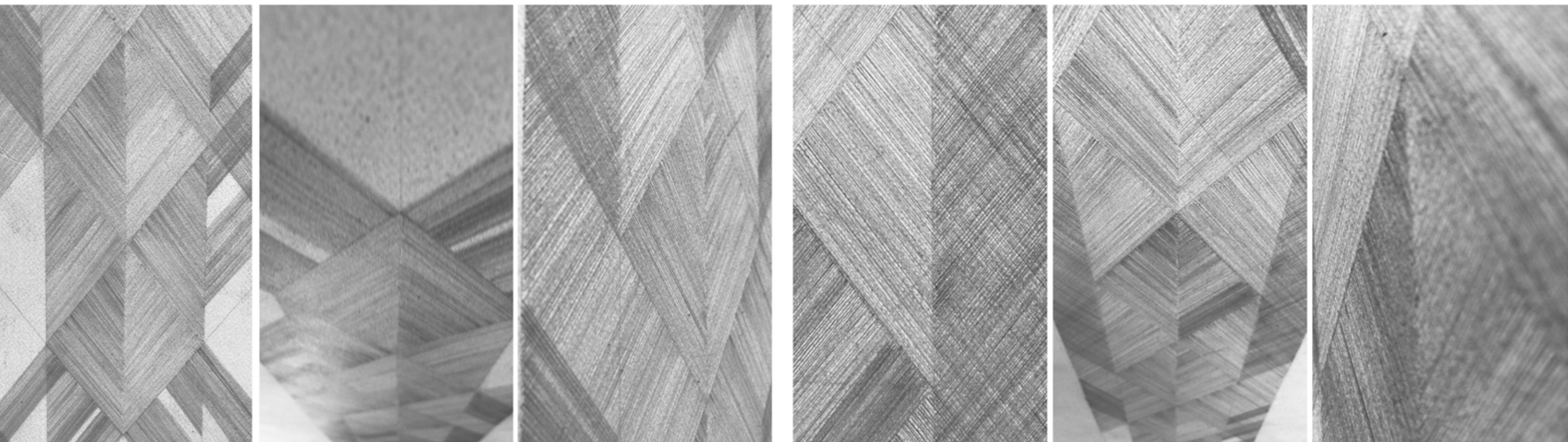


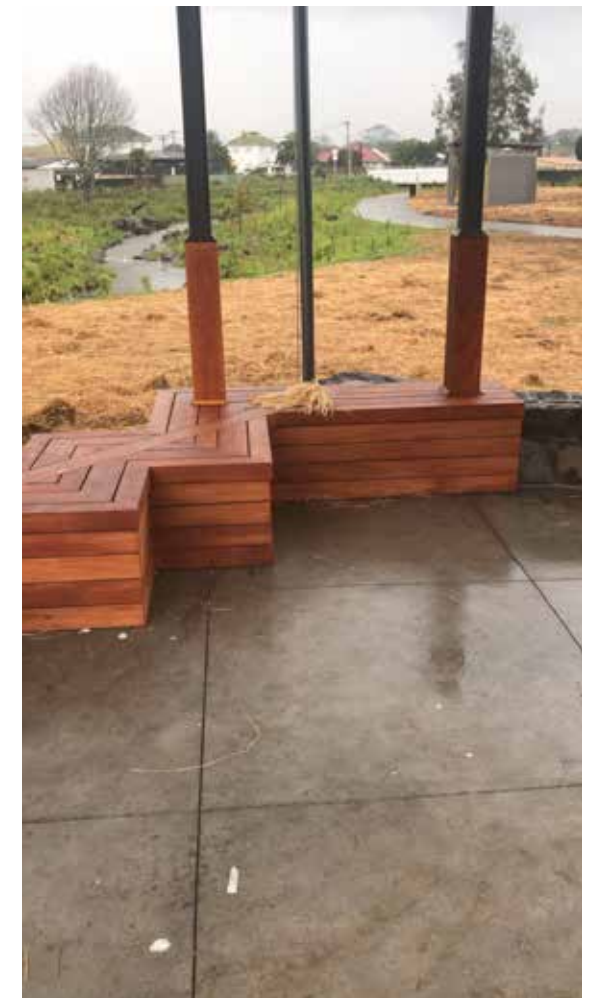
Fig 10.2. Latu, Vena. Drawing. Structural Forms of Starting Point Lalava Line Drawing. 2019



Fig 11.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Drawing. Lalava Bag. 2019
 Fig 11.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Drawing. Lalava Ball. 2019
 Fig 11.3. Latu, Vena. Digital Drawing. Lalava Shoes. 2019
 Fig 11.4. Latu, Vena. Digital Drawing. Lalava Jandals. 2019

Fig 12.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Photograph. Multicultural Fale by Filipe Tohi and McCoy + Heine Architects, Mount Roskill, Walmsley Park. 2019

Fig 12.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photograph. A Series of Perspectives of Walmsley Park and Multicultural Fale. 2019



As a social and spiritual relationship between people, the *vā* is important in understanding the ways that Polynesian people relate with one another and the world at large.⁴¹ Living in South Auckland, I have encountered many cultures and have been in many social spaces. Auckland is one of the largest Polynesian cities in the world. Many Polynesian families reside in South Auckland. One place I am familiar with is the Māngere Town Centre, a place of social gatherings and cultural interconnections. People come from all over Auckland to visit Māngere Town Centre every week for its social events like the flea markets, free Zumba classes and local art shows and performances held in the Māngere Art Centre (figure 14.1). It also contains energetic and general urban and natural recreation centres in the Moana-Nui-a-Kiwa Leisure Centre and David Lange Park (figure 13.1). The park is located right across from the Māngere Town Centre; it is named after one of the many famous children of South Auckland, who was a member of parliament for Māngere from 1977–1996⁴² and a Prime Minister – gaining world recognition for his debate on his argument on how “nuclear weapons are morally indefensible.”⁴³

As a resident of Māngere, I have visited David Lange Park on numerous occasions. The park contains a playground, skate-park, basketball court, volleyball court, netball court, exercise equipment and a large field perfect for field activities such as rugby training and touch rugby. These attributes of David Lange Park are what attract the locals, especially youth, to these spaces, providing a lively environment through the social interaction of play and exercise. The Māngere Art Centre and Fale o Samoa (figure 15.1) both exhibit aspects of Pacific culture on site while also feeling inaccessible as they are used for events and exhibitions, thus making these spaces closed off. As *lalava* symbolises connection, I wanted this project to provide an open and interactive space that provides a link to the past for the public, especially those who are like me and are wanting to seek a cultural connection. As David Lange Park interconnects residents through active play, I decided to embark on a research project that provides an open interactive space for the public to learn about the ancient art of *lalava* by providing a link to the past for the Pacific children of today.

41 I’uogafa Tuagalu, “Heuristics of the *Vā*.” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 4, no. 1 (2008): 108.

42 “David Lange Collection.” *The Community Archive*, <https://thecommunityarchive.org.nz/node/271554/description>

43 “David Lange Biography.” *New Zealand History*, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/people/david-lange>



Fig 13.1. Site Map of David Lange Park. Retrieved from <https://geomapspublic.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/viewer/index.html>



Fig 13.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Perspective of David Lange Park from the Road. 2019



Fig 13.4. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. David Lange Basketball Court. 2019



Fig 13.3. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Entry into David Lange Park from Main Road. 2019



Fig 13.5. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. David Lange Park Skate Park. 2019



Fig 13.6 Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. David Lange Park Playground, and Exercise Equipments. 2019



Fig 13.8. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. David Lange Park Swing Sets, Old Basketball Court. 2019



Fig 13.7. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. David Lange Park Large Field Space. 2019



Fig 13.8. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. David Lange Park Volleyball Court. 2019

Fig 14.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Mangere Arts Centre. 2019



Fig 14.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Mangere Arts Centre Gallery Spaces. 2019

Fig 15.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Fale o Samoa. 2019

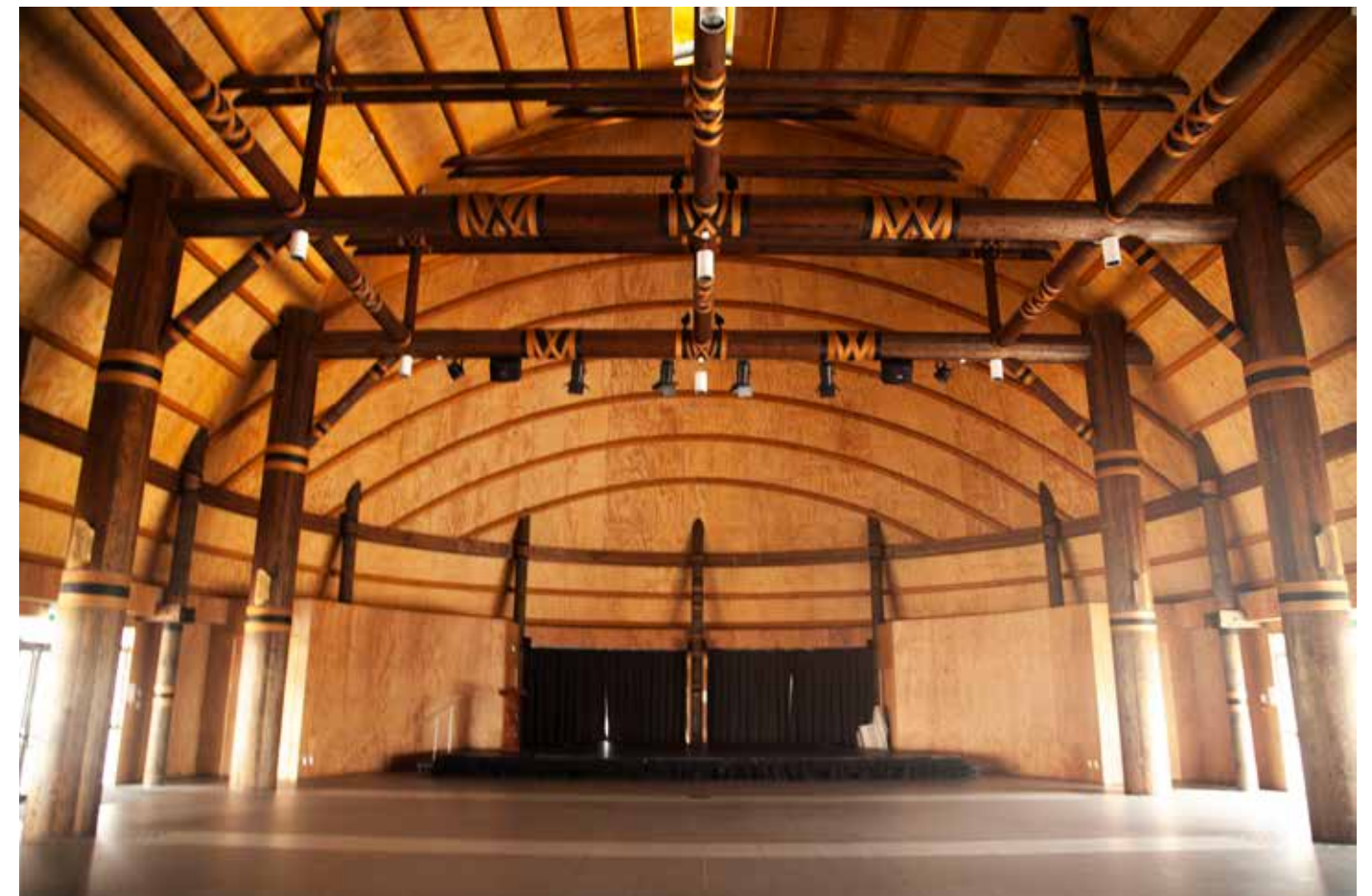
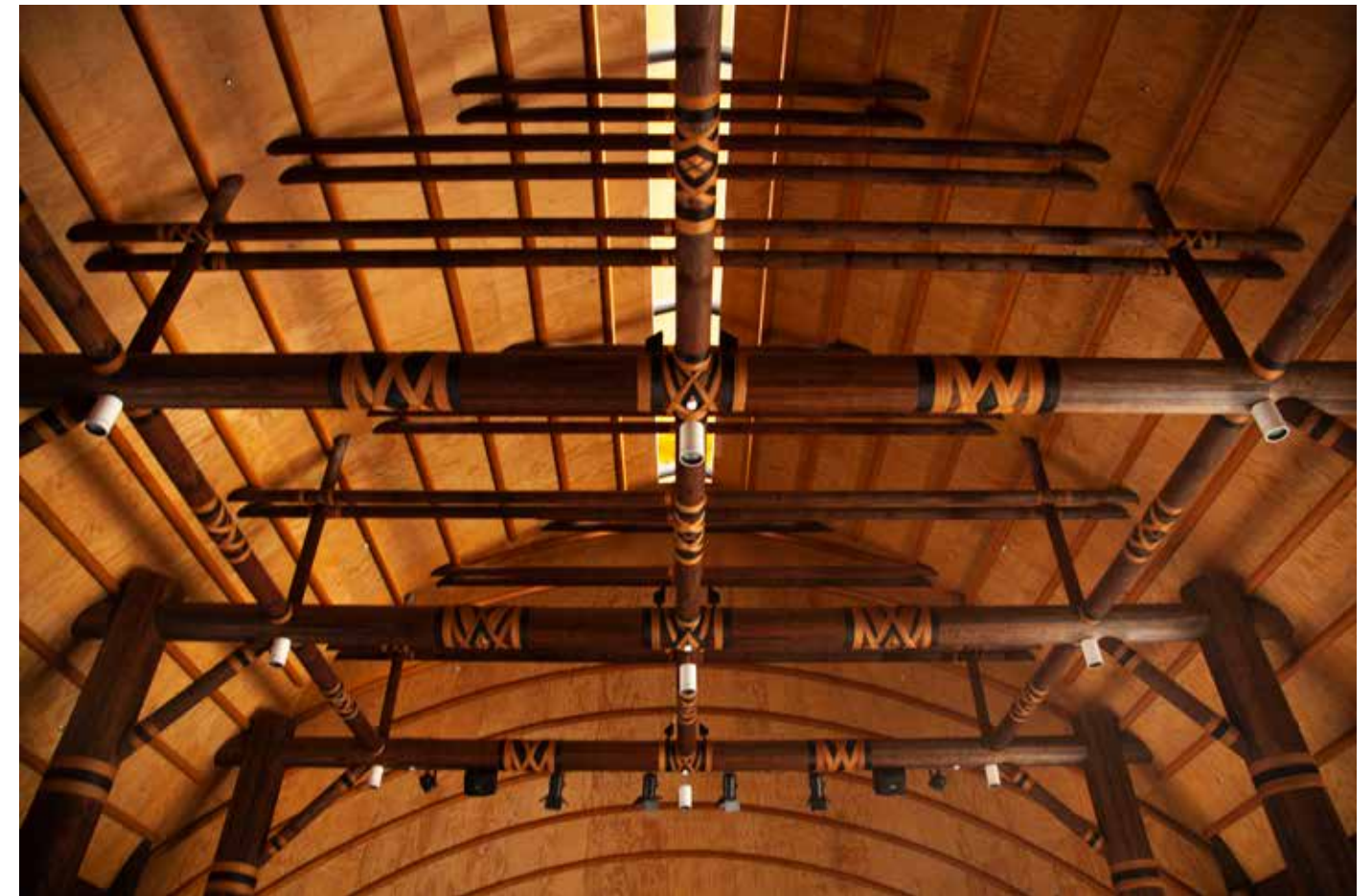


Fig 15.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Fale o Samoa Interior. 2019

To begin the research project, I decided to practice the traditional art of lalava-making but outside of its fale- and vaka-building contexts in order to interpret these lashings into different design contexts and structural forms. Firstly, I explored lalava through fashion as my first encounter with kafa was its use for traditional clothing attire or, more specifically, 'accessories' (figures 17.1 & 17.2). I proceeded to apply lalava patterns onto a mannequin using kafa as a means of making the kafa the main attire (figure 18.1) and not an accessory. Seeing lalava in the form of an outfit was very satisfying in the sense of experiencing the narrative of lalava-making for the first time.

Secondly, I began searching for forms that could benefit from lalava as an alternative to building with hammers and nails. To do this I examined the fence that surrounds my house, creating this boundary that protects my home from the outside world. The fence establishes a sense of place, protecting the space within, while also creating a sense of personal space. The concept of protection can be a theme that branches from the idea of a connection; the connection is between a person and home, protected by the boundary made by the fence. It is interesting because the fale is built to protect us from the tropical sun during the day and the cold nights; canoes were made to preserve voyagers from drowning as they sail the Pacific Ocean. The example of the fale and vaka may be different from that of the fence, but they do serve the same purpose of protection and creating a sense of a boundary to possible danger. The fence, I believe, is also an invention of the Western world, built to separate land or property. By combining this with the lalava techniques forms a cultural connection between the Pacific and Western world.

I proceeded to make a fence using lalava, but on a smaller scale. Using six small timber pieces, I began lashing patterns on each piece individually before connecting them. Unfortunately, I did not take into consideration the length of each lalava outcome as they all turned out unevenly. Nonetheless, I continued to carry out this task and planted each piece in a small area in my garden (figures 19.1, 19.2 & 19.3). I designed the lalava patterns after that of the kupesi⁴⁴ (figures 16.1, 16.2 & 16.3) as there is a variety of designs inspired by the environment. I attempted to create my own kupesi pattern, taking inspiration from the kalou kupesi (figure 16.2) with its border around the diamond while intersecting a crisscross shape that holds a diamond gap in the middle (figure 1). Figures 1.2 and 1.3 used the same technique of lashing and binding, where I shaped it after the Tokelau Feletoa Kupesi (figure 16.1) while in the form of the Amoamokofe Kupesi (figure 16.3).

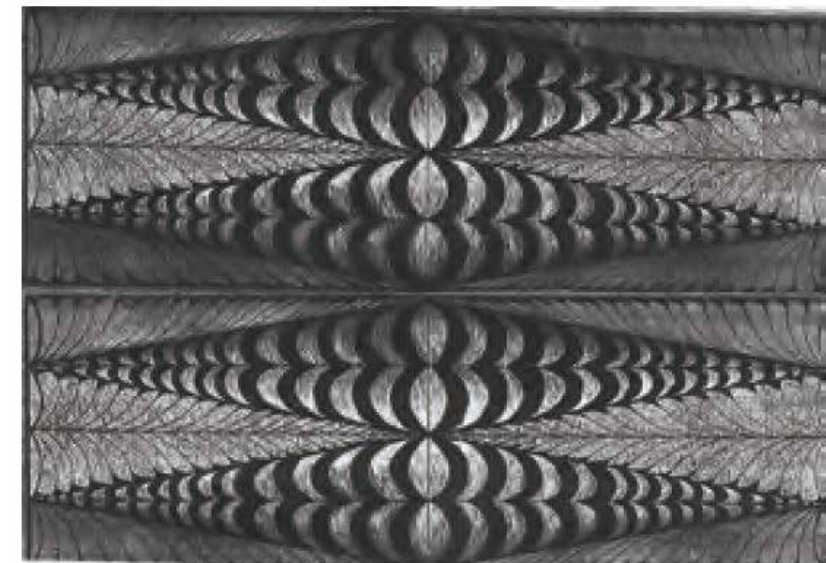


Fig 16.1. Tokelau Feletoa Kupesi. Said to be the flesh of the tuna fish when cut across the middle part. Retrieved from Unesco. Intangible Cultural Heritage Section. 2014. "Kupesi: A Creative." In *Traditional knowledge and wisdom : themes from the Pacific Islands*: 331

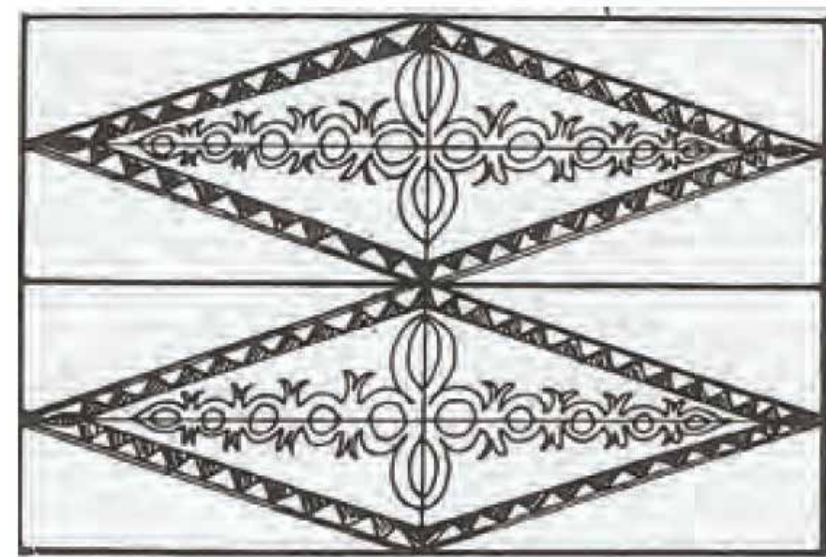


Fig 16.2. Kalou Kupesi. The Kalou is said to be the inside of the mapa fruit. Retrieved from Unesco. Intangible Cultural Heritage Section. 2014. "Kupesi: A Creative." In *Traditional knowledge and wisdom : themes from the Pacific Islands*: 331

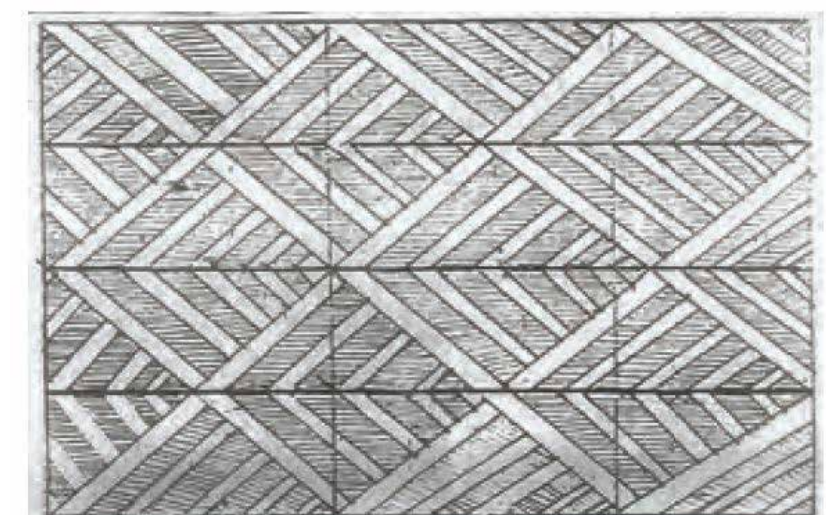


Fig 16.3. Amoamokofe Kupesi. The patterns are set up with the midrib of the green coconut frond (palalafa). Retrieved from Unesco. Intangible Cultural Heritage Section. 2014. "Kupesi: A Creative." In *Traditional knowledge and wisdom : themes from the Pacific Islands*: 331

⁴⁴ Kupesi are traditional Tongan patterns – forms are usually triangular and are repetitive.

These accesories were made by my mother.



Fig 17.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Kafa Accessories. Kahoa made from Kafa. 2019

Fig 17.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Kafa Accessories. Kafa Leta. 2019



Fig 18.1. Latu, Vena. Lalava Outfit. Applying Lalava onto a Fashion Contexts. 2018

Fig 18.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Lalava Outfit. Close-up of Abdomen Section of Outfit. 2018

Fig 18.3. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Lalava Outfit. Close-up of Neck and Collar Section of Outfit. 2018





Fig 19.1. Latu, Vena. Lalava Fence. Planted Outside my Home. 2019

Fig 19.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Lalava Fence. Low-angled Shot. 2019

Fig 19.3. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Lalava Fence. Front Shot. 2019

Geometric lalava patterns are a complex intersection of lines which I found difficult to replicate through making, hence the patterns I created on the lalava fence seem to be simpler than that of Filipe Tohi's design (figure 2). To further my understanding of lalava, I proceeded to replicate these patterns through drawing. The illustration of lalava patterns I produced assisted me in thinking about what it means to make connections through drawing. The result of the lalava line drawing (figure 10.1) did not come out the way I wanted it to due to the contrast of the lines being very uneven and the outcome of the lines not being very parallel to one another. Only through my meetings with supervisors was I able to see the real beauty of the elements I viewed as mistakes. The difference in shading contrast allowed me to unravel a structural form as it created a three-dimensional shape (figure 10.2), creating an intensity of space through its use of lines.

Initially, I did not consider driving as a method of any sort as it is an everyday chore for me until I started using the Waterview tunnels (figure 21) to get to school, as the walls began to form into the geometric patterns of lalava (figure 23) and thus I began referring to it as a lalava tunnel. This was most interesting as I have only observed lalava on the surface while wondering what the inside might look and feel like. The tunnels created a spatial phenomenon as it is the *vā* that links two separate sides of the motorway. I created both digital (figure 20.3) and hand-crafted models using kafa and balsa wood (figure 20.1), imagining what the interior of lalava may look like in the form of a tunnel; I later changed this to a pavilion as it provides a closer encounter with the viewer. The gaps in between lines allow entry for light to reflect off the floor creating a lalava pattern through light and shadow (figure 20.2). The light rays shining through the gaps between lines help 'shape the space'⁴⁵ creating a metaphoric intersection between material and immaterial. This pavilion model led me to craft other models (figures 24.1 & 24.2) in the sense of influencing the immaterial of light and shadow.

⁴⁵ Fabio G S. Giucastro, "Natural Light in Architecture: Use Inspired by the Constructive Tradition," in *Sustainable Building for a Cleaner Environment*, ed. Ali Sayigh (Berlin: Springer, 2017), 2.



Fig 20.1. Latu, Vena. Model Making. Lalava Pavilion Using Kafa and Balsa Wood Materials. 2019



Fig 20.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Model Making. Lalava Pavilion. Experimenting with Light and Shadow. 2019

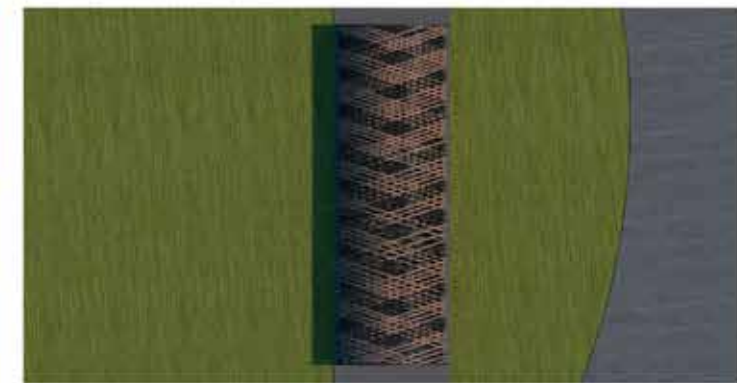
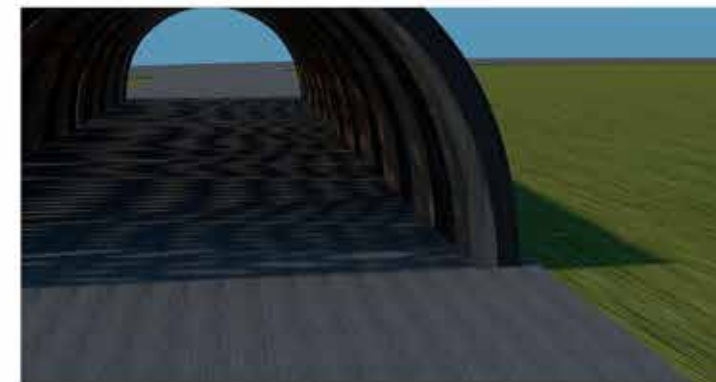
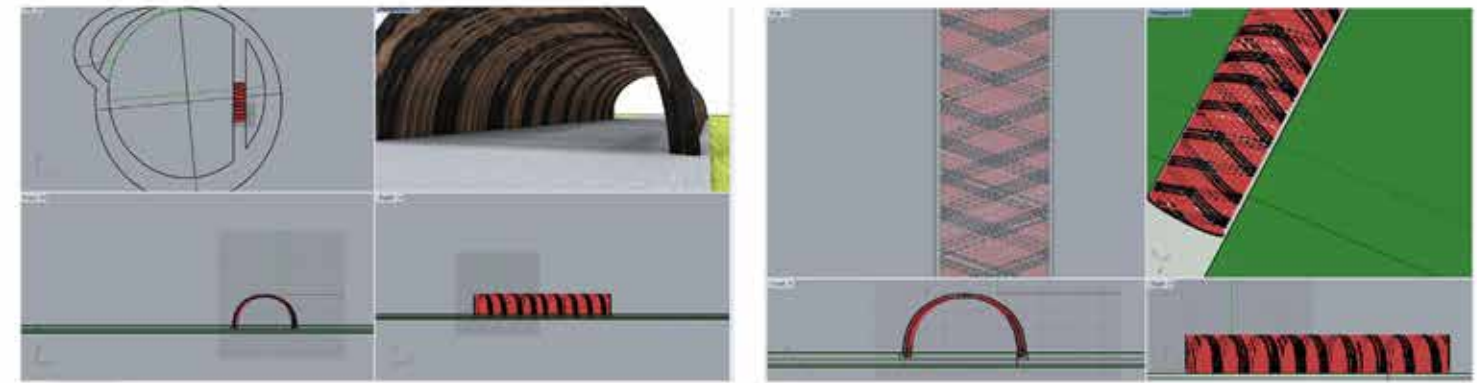


Fig 20.3. Latu, Vena. Model Making. Digital Fabrication of Lalava Pavilion. 2019



Fig 21. Fruean, Mafa and Latu, Vena. Digital Photography.
Driving Method. A Series of Perspectives of Waterview
Tunnels Interior. 2019

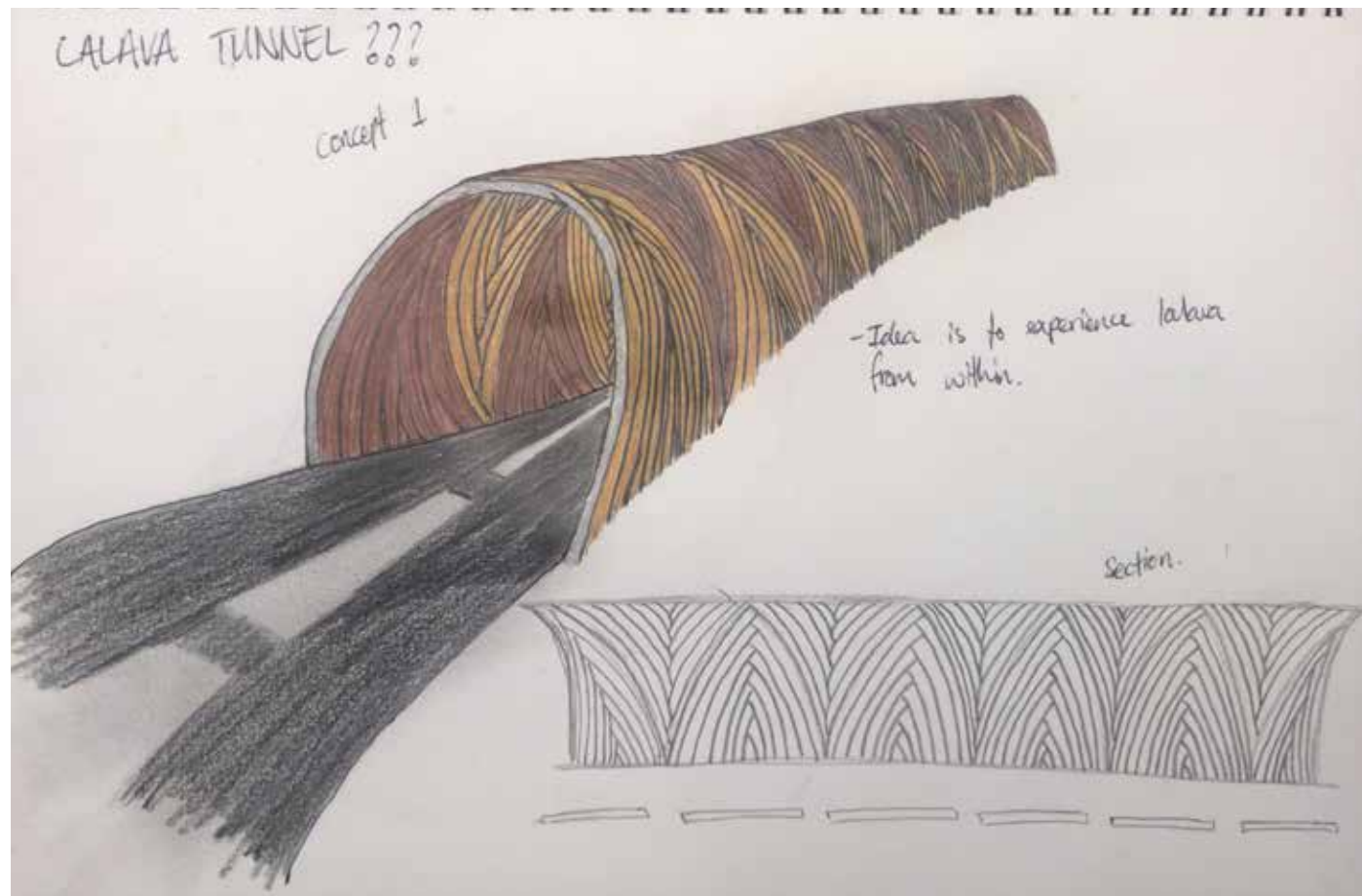


Fig 22. Latu, Vena. Drawing. Lalava Tunnel. 2019



Fig 23. Latu, Vena. Digital Drawings. Bringing to Life What I was Visualising within the Waterview Tunnels. Interior becoming a Lalava Threshold. 2019

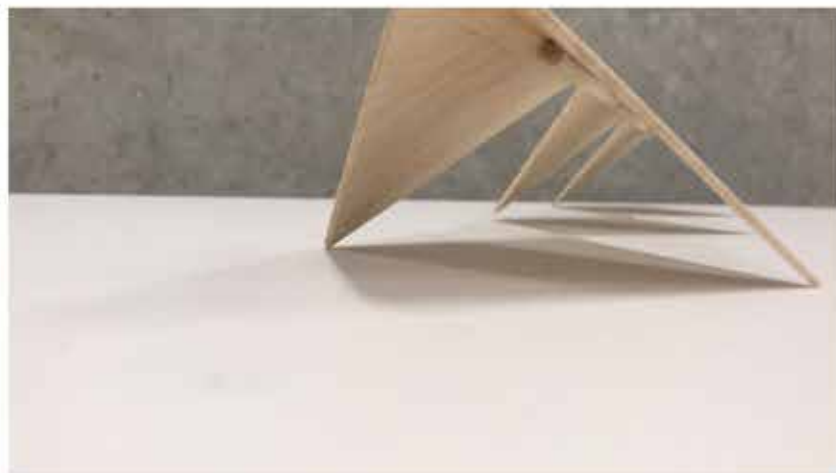
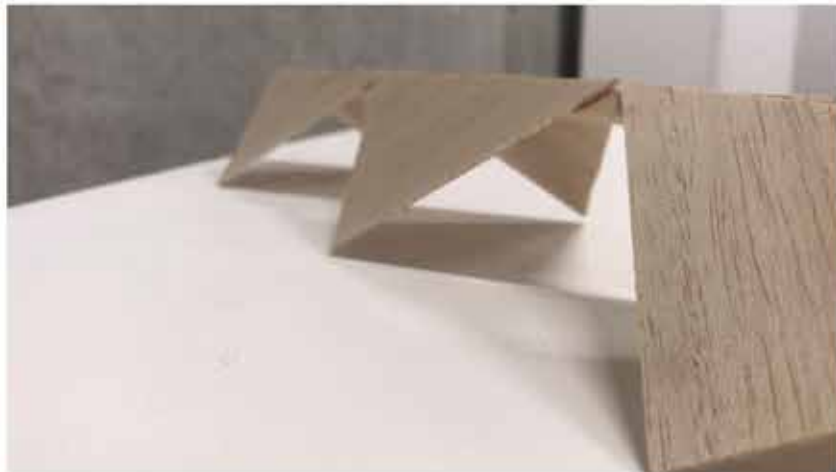
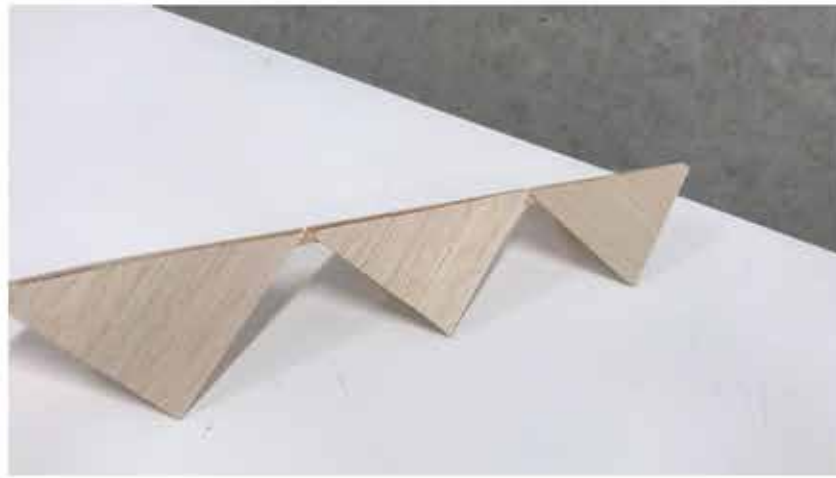


Fig 24.1. Latu, Vena. Experimenting with Model Making as a means of Playing with Immaterial and Material. 2019



Fig 24.2. Latu, Vena. Experimenting with Model Making as a means of Playing with Immaterial and Material. 2019

Fig 25.1. Latu, Vena. Videography. Driving in Tonga. Traditional Patterns in the form of Fences. Field Research. 2019

Travelling to Tonga to undertake research was very special for me as it was my first time there and had I had wanted to do this trip for a long time. We stayed at my mother's hometown of Nuku'alofa. Accompanying me on this trip was my father, as he would be the bridge between two cultural realities. My first impression of Tonga was the togetherness, and social connections amongst locals, the atmosphere felt peaceful as compared to that of busy environment of Auckland city. The influence on atmosphere accumulates to the number of citizens that occupy the space; as Yi-Fu Tuan noted, "the relationship of environment to feelings seems clear."⁴⁶ The feeling of the environment created within the landscape of Nuku'alofa is very open and interconnected despite the scale being very small. In the city centre in Tonga, there were large amounts of spaces. Initially, I thought these spaces served no purpose, but as the days went on, I realised it was communal space for social interactions where the locals would talanoa for the whole day. Culture and tradition are a massive influence on daily life in Tonga; as Adrienne Kaeppler noted, "the importance of history and tracing of genealogies continues to affect the daily lives of all Tongans."⁴⁷ As I navigated my way around Tonga, whether by car or on foot, I could see that Tongan locals had interpreted traditional patterns into the designs of their fences (figures 25.1 & 25.2) and wall decorations (figure 25.3). For me this indicates how intertwined Tongan people are with culture and the importance of keeping these traditional patterns alive. The ocean is an influential part of Tongan life as it is the inspiration for many sculptures and other crafts I came across in the markets and art gallery such as whales (figure 26.1), turtles (figure 26.4) and Maui's fish hook (figure 26.2). Having these art pieces presented in an open space like the local markets creates a gallery-like feel despite a market being a place of business. The Wesleyan churches of Tonga, where the architecture of these buildings resembles that of the fale, also contained lalava. On Sundays in Tonga, the whole country closes as it is a rest day – a link to the creation story where God rested on the seventh day. I visited five churches during my time in Tonga, Tupou College Moulton Memorial Chapel (figure 35.1), Ma'ufanga Cathedral (St Mary's Cathedral (figure 39.1), Basilica Sagato Anthony of Padua (figure 38.1), The Sia'atoutai Theological College Chapel (figure 36.1), and The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Pelehake (figure 37.4).⁴⁸



⁴⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan, "Spaciousness and Crowding," in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 55.

⁴⁷ Kaeppler, *From the Stone Age to the Space Age in 200 Years*.

⁴⁸ See appendix for an analysis of these churches.



Fig 25.2. Latu, Vena. Videography. Driving in Tonga. Traditional Patterns in the form of Fences. Field Research. 2019



Fig 25.3. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Traditional Patterns used as Decoration on Walls. Field Research. 2019



Fig 26.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Sculpture of Whales in Tongan Market. 2019

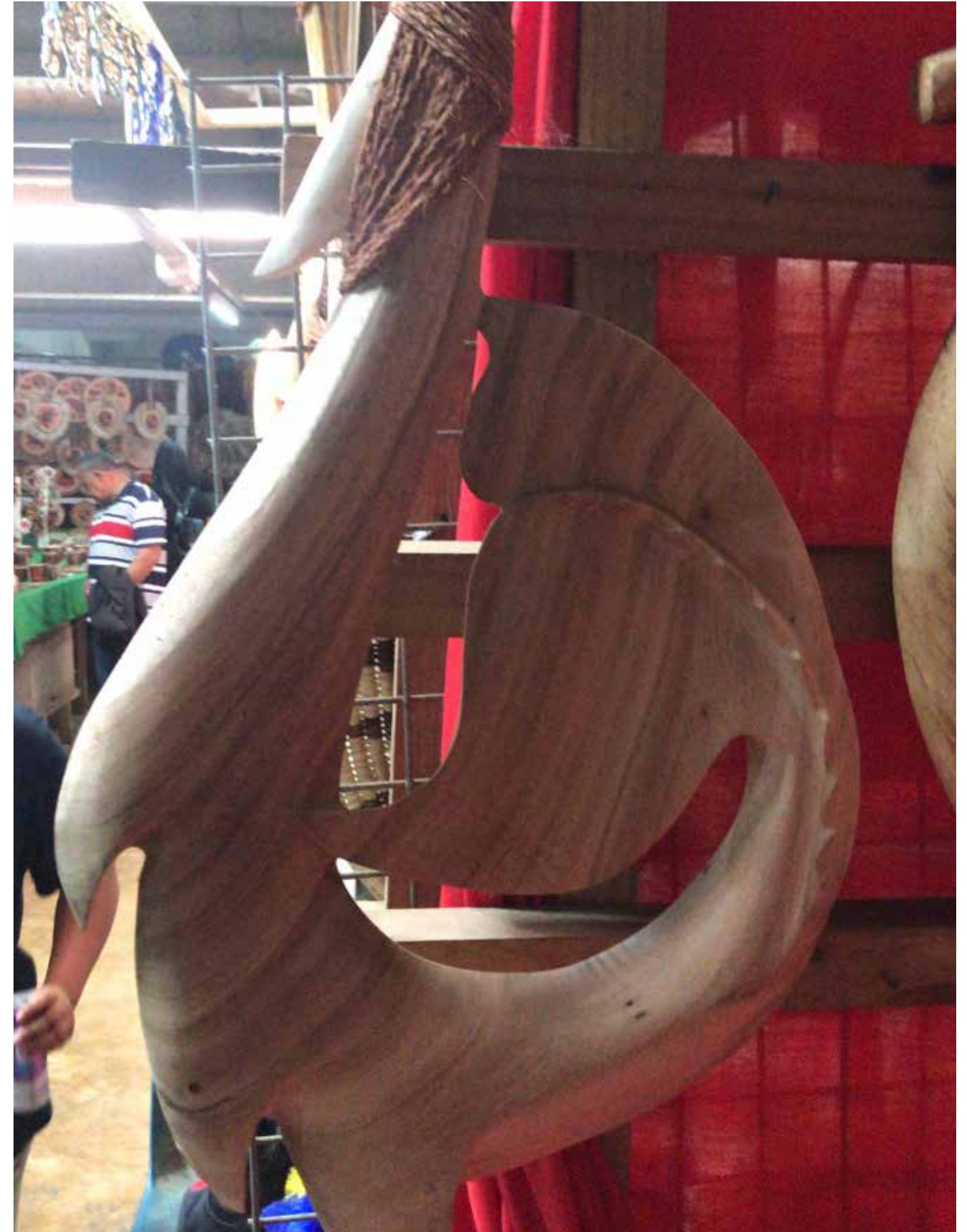


Fig 26.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Sculpture of Maui's Fish Hook in Tongan Market. 2019



Fig 26.3. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. A Variety of Sculptures found in Tongan Market. 2019



Fig 26.4. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Sculpture of Turtles and Traditional drums and Weapons found in Tongan Market. 2019

On my return to New Zealand, I started thinking about how to create a project within an already open and busy space through its existing recreational facilities. From here, I began constructing models through both hand-craft and digital fabrication as a means of designing possible structures that will host specific programmes that can provide knowledge about ancient Polynesian art and lalava. Reflecting on my time Tonga, I began thinking about social structures that brought communities together, that provided a space to learn about indigenous art and traditions such as art galleries and museums. I started researching open outdoor spaces and came across the Brazilian Children's Village (figure 27) designed by the Aleph Zero and Rosenbaum architecture studios. I drew out ideas and began developing a structure similar to children's village on Rhinoceros 3D modelling software, interpreting it within a fale structure (figure 28) where the programming of the project would be that of an outdoor museum. This idea did not work as the scale was far too large and unnecessary due to the site already having the Fale o Samoa, meaning there was no need for another fale. I also felt the layout of the park was unsuitable for an outdoor museum. The focus of this initial design did not focus on lalava but more on the fale-style architecture.

Moving forward, I was still interested in searching for ways to express cultural knowledge through lalava. I then decided to scale down this project as a means of making it more accessible to youth. Continuing to use Rhinoceros 3D modelling software, I created 'learning spaces' similar to the museum. I conducted research on gallery spaces (figure 14.2) and wondered how I could bring these contemporary, yet sensitive, spaces onto an open and public area. I began designing a small structure where I patterned the designs of the exterior after the outer lines that shape the lalava patterns (figure 29.1). The interior consisted of triangular-shaped displays and pop-up walls as a means of holding art and artefacts (figure 29.2). I later laser cut (figures 29.3 & 29.4) and 3D printed (figure 29.5) this design as a means of playing with natural light as the artificial light provided by Rhinoceros created an unrealistic effect. Moving forward, I decided to develop the design further as the exterior lacked the lashing aspect of lalava.



Fig 27. Aleph Zero and Rosenbaum Architecture Studios. Children's Village. Retrieved from <https://www.archdaily.com/879960/children-village-rosenbaum-plus-aleph-zero>

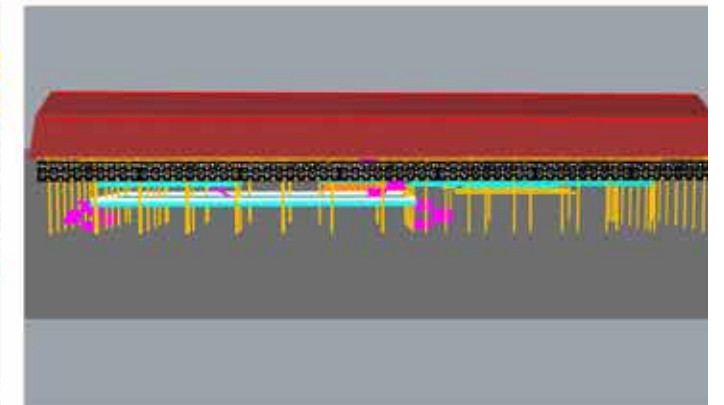
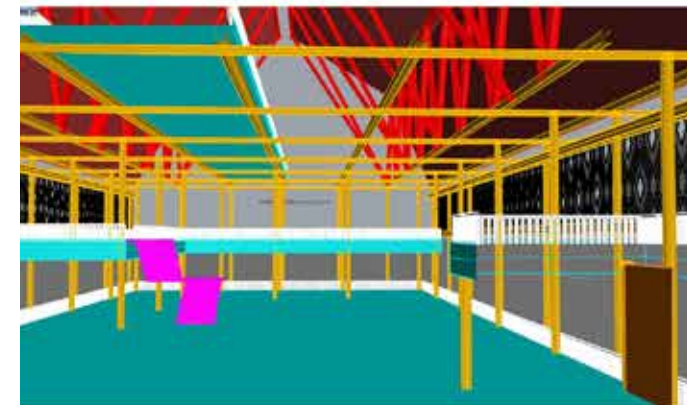
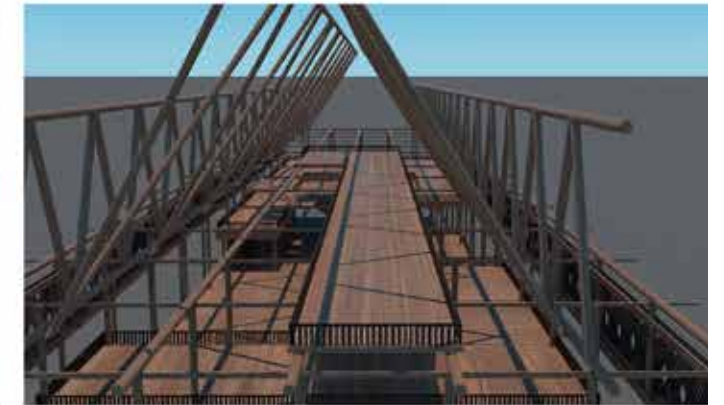
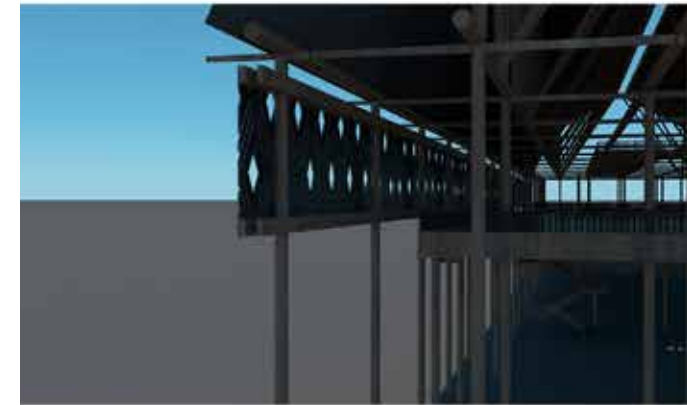
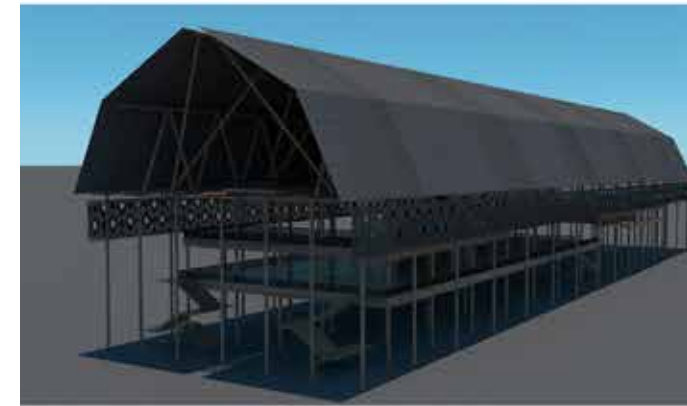


Fig 28. Latu. Vena. Digital Fabrication. Concept Model, Outdoor Museum Fale. 2019

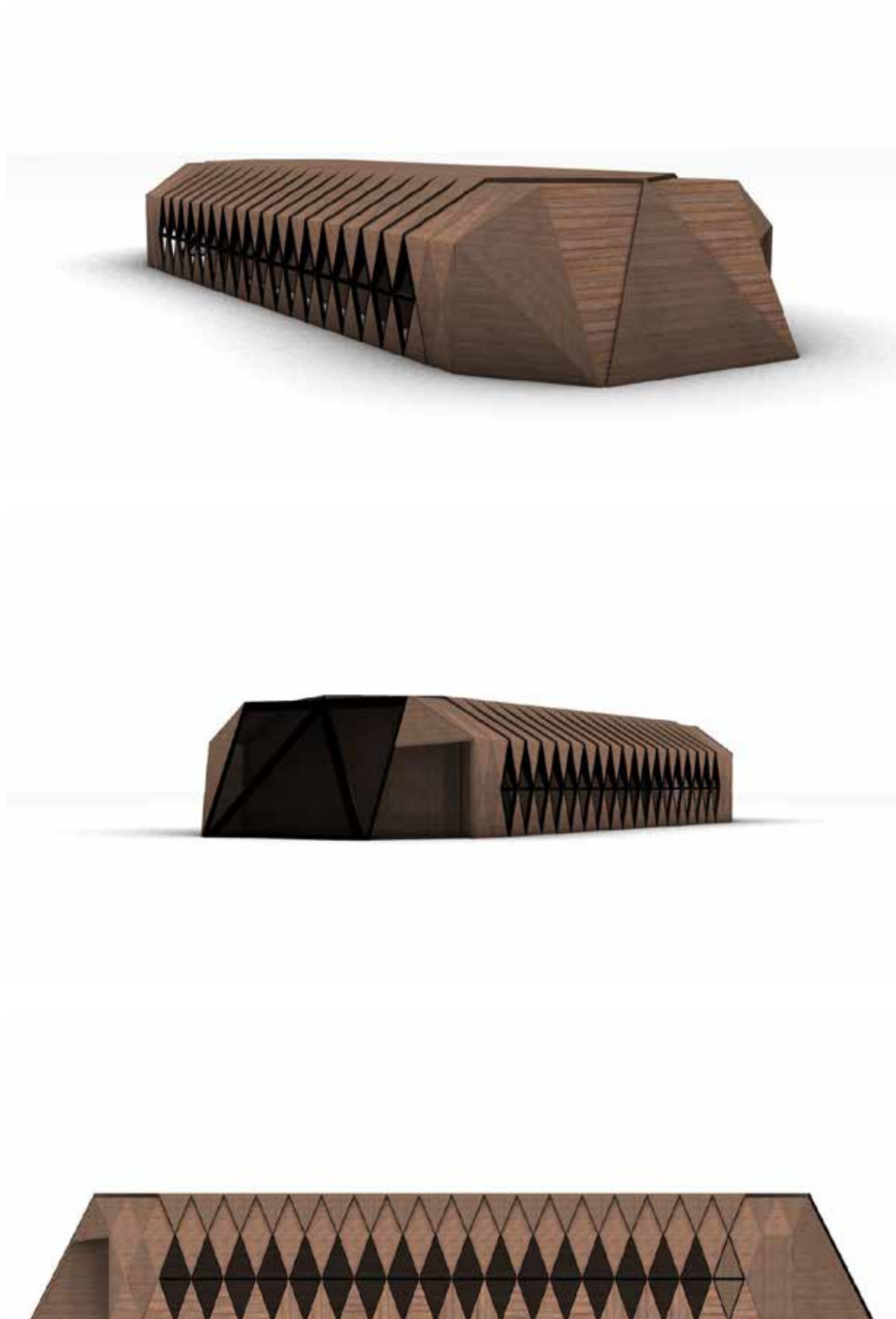


Fig 29.1. Latu. Vena. Digital Fabrication. Concept Model.
Open Gallery Space. Exteriors. 2019

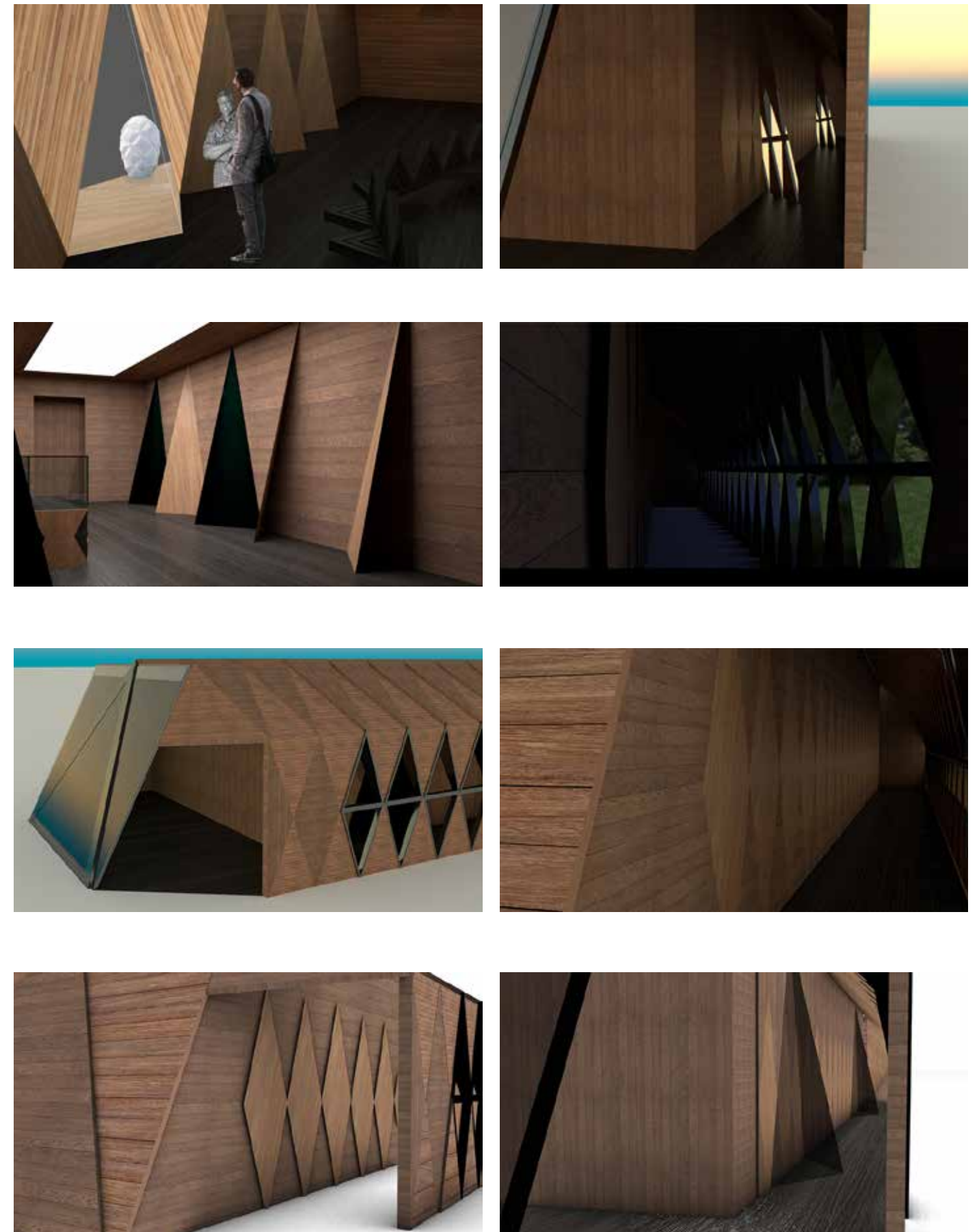


Fig 29.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Concept Model.
Open Gallery Space. Interior and Experimenting with
Artificial Light. 2019

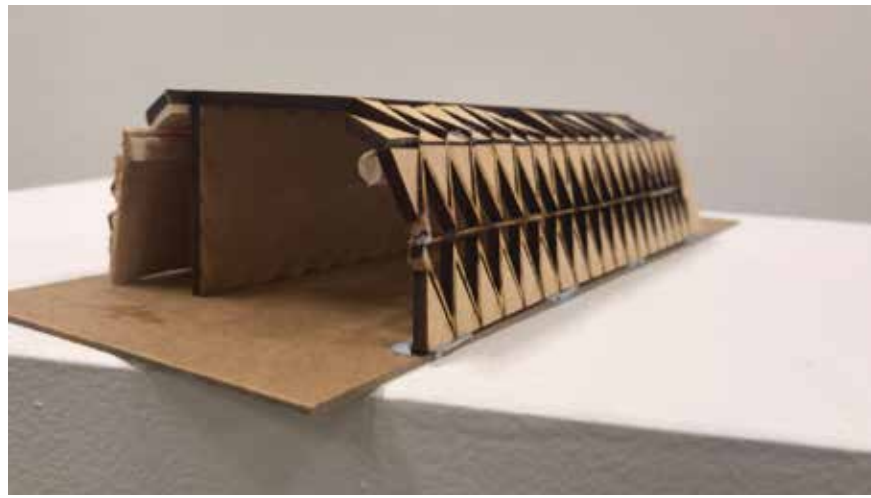


Fig 29.3. Latu, Vena. Model Making. Open Gallery Space Laser Cut. Experimenting with Light and Shadow. 2019

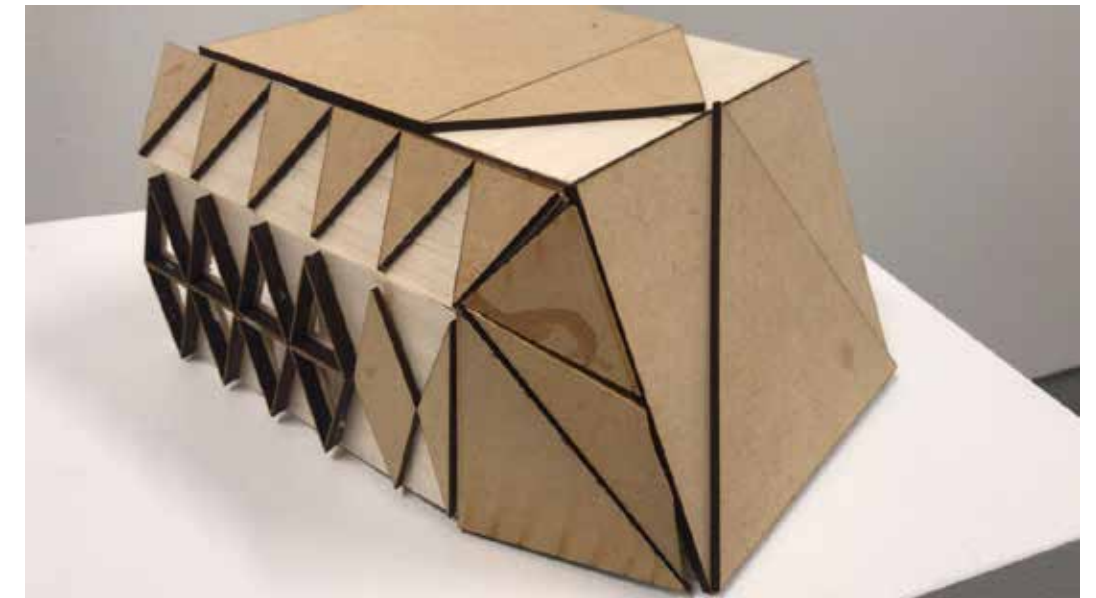


Fig 29.4. Latu, Vena. Model Making. Open Gallery Space Laser Cut. Experimenting with Light and Shadow. 2019



*Fig 29.5. Latu, Vena. Model Making. Open Gallery Space
3D Printed Model. 2019*

I began looking into the work of Rewi Thompson Fish Canopy (figure 31) located in the Otara Town Centre in order to understand “how to avoid simplistic imitations of traditional structures through materials and metaphors.”⁴⁹ Thompson designed a series of canopies that makes up a fish’s body with the midsection as a “contemporary adaptation of the fale”⁵⁰ – not directly mirroring its traditional form but interpreting it into a fish creating a link to the Pacific.⁵¹ I further developed the design of figure 29.1 using my starting point image along with Filipe Tohi’s Tu’uheta steel sculpture (figure 30) to create a lashing effect on the exterior and roof (figure 33.1). The exterior lines contained gaps in between them, thus creating the same effect with light which I mentioned earlier in regard to the lalava pavilion (figures 33.3 & 33.4). I doubled these structures and added a wall using the same exterior design all around, creating an interior turning the two structures into rooms for a gallery and lalava workshop (figure 33.2). I added a small diamond-shaped fale in the middle with two large triangular roofs standing on its side representing the form of a flying bird – a metaphorical toloa (flying duck). The spaces in between the rooms became larger, thus turning the project into a Pacific Centre of sorts. This was unnecessary as the Fale o Samoa provided a Pacific Centre for Māngere Town Centre as well as the Lesieli Tonga Auditorium designed by Bull O’Sullivan (figure 32.1) as another Pacific Centre located in Māngere. These two large structures provide a venue that brings the community together to host events and cultural activities – through their architectural forms they provide two different links to the Pacific as the fale presents a cultural nostalgia and the auditorium as a contemporary adaptation. What I aim to do differently is create a space that allows the observer to learn about Tongan and Polynesian culture through the phenomenology of lalava-making.



Fig 30. Tohi, Filipe. Tu’uheta Sculpture (back view).
Retrieved from <http://www.lalava.net/index.php/ct-menu-item-17#4>

⁴⁹ Albert L. Refiti, “Recontextualising Polynesian Architecture in Aotearoa New Zealand,” in *The Handbook of Contemporary Indigenous Architecture*, eds. Elizabeth Grant et al. (Berlin, Springer, 2018), 137.

⁵⁰ Refiti, Albert. “Making Spaces: Polynesian Architecture in Aotearoa New Zealand,” in *Pacific Art Niu Sila: The Pacific Dimension of Contemporary New Zealand Arts*, eds. Sean Mallon and Fuli Pereira (Wellington, New Zealand: Te Papa Press, 2002), 221.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Fig 31. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. A Series of Images of the Otara Fish Canopy Designed by Rewi Thompson. 2019

Fish Head.



Fish Tail.



Fish Body.



Fish Body Interior.



Fig 32.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Lesieli
Tonga Auditorium Designed by Bull O'Sullivan.
2019

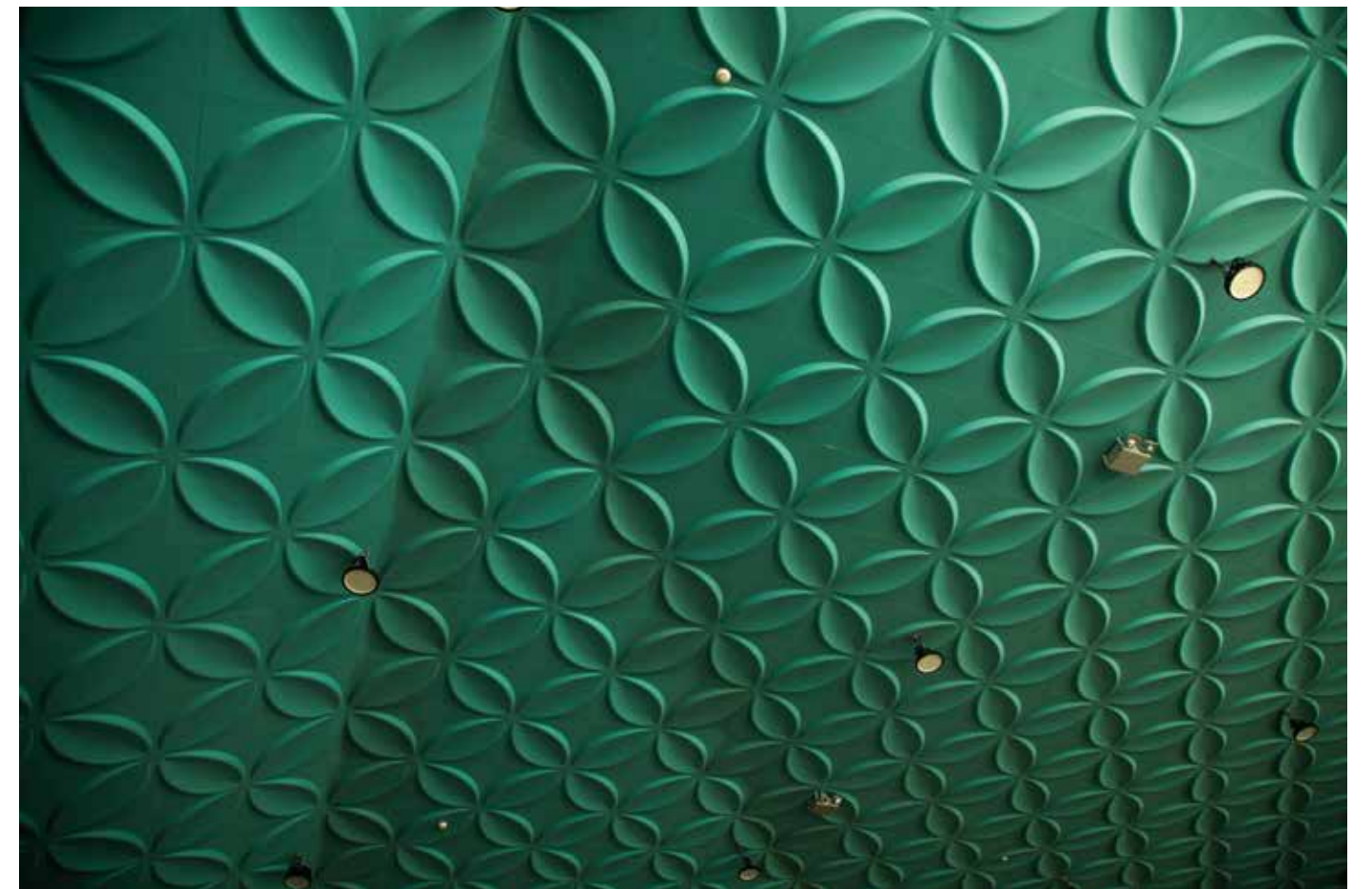


Fig 32.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Lesieli Tonga
Auditorium Interior and Ceiling. 2019

Fig 33.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Pacific Centre.
Axonometric Explosion. 2019

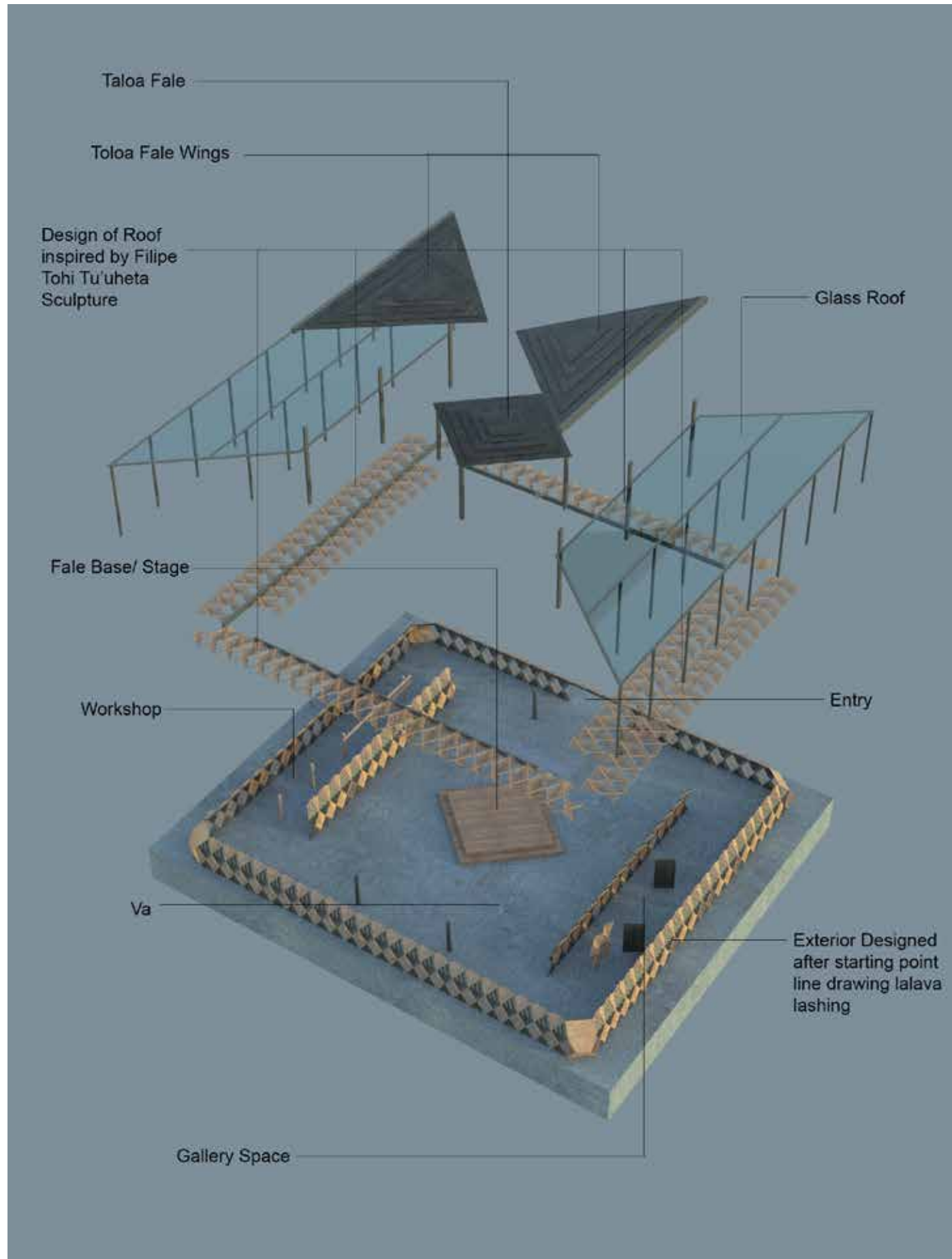


Fig 33.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Pacific Centre.
Perspectives of Workshop and Gallery Space. 2019



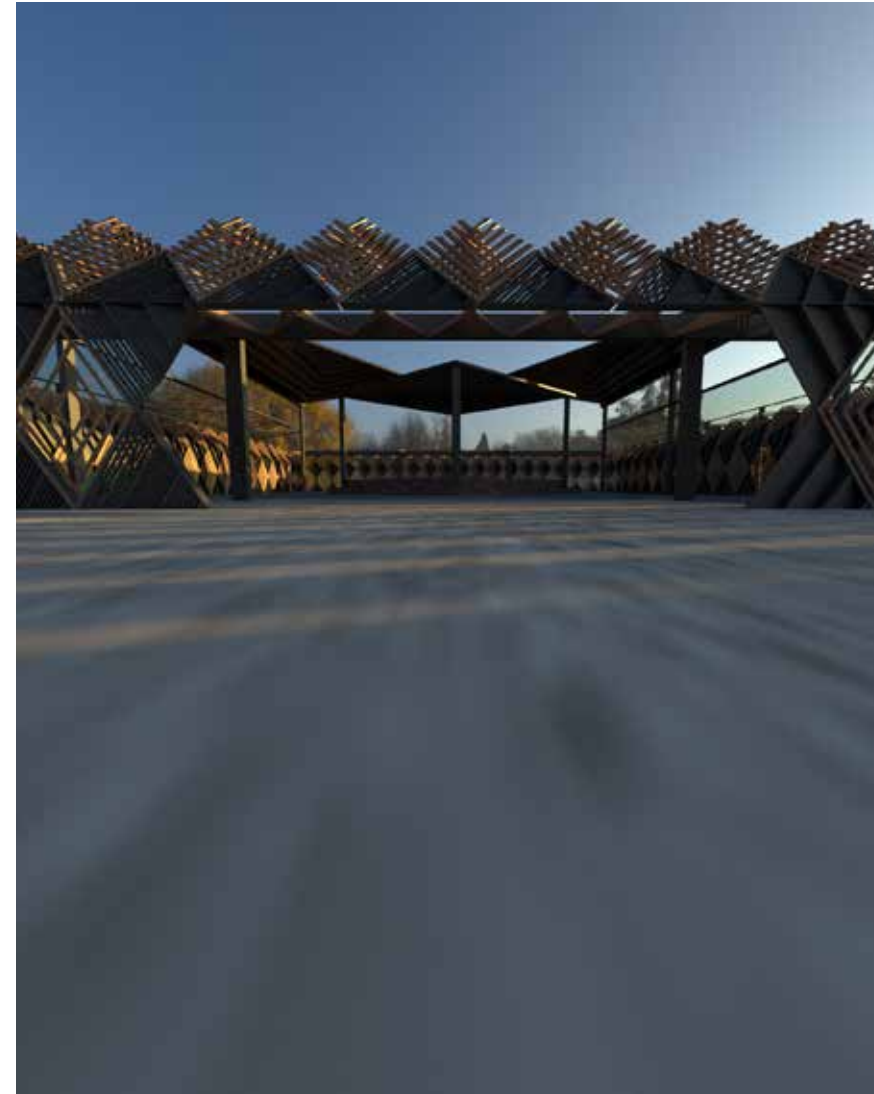
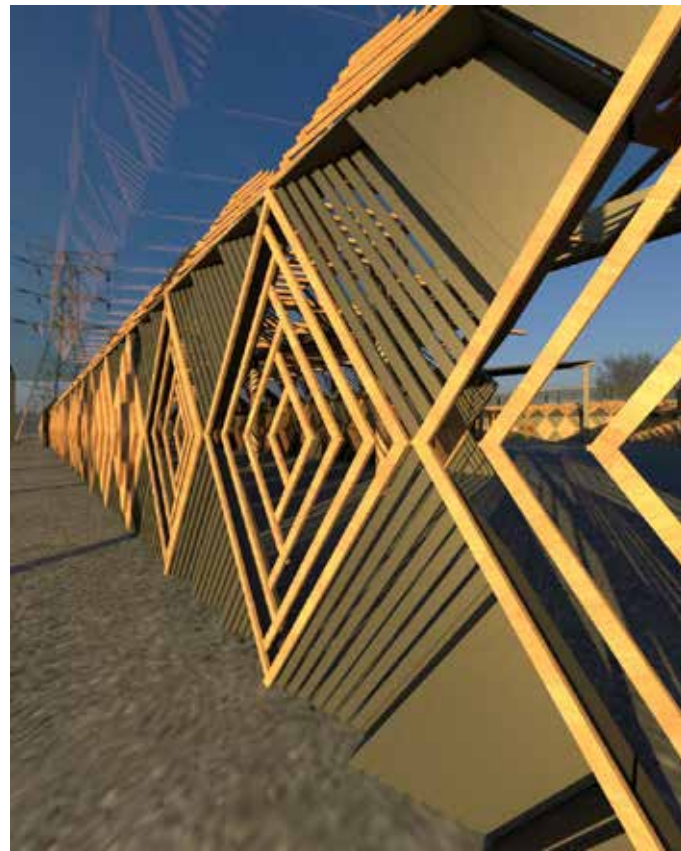
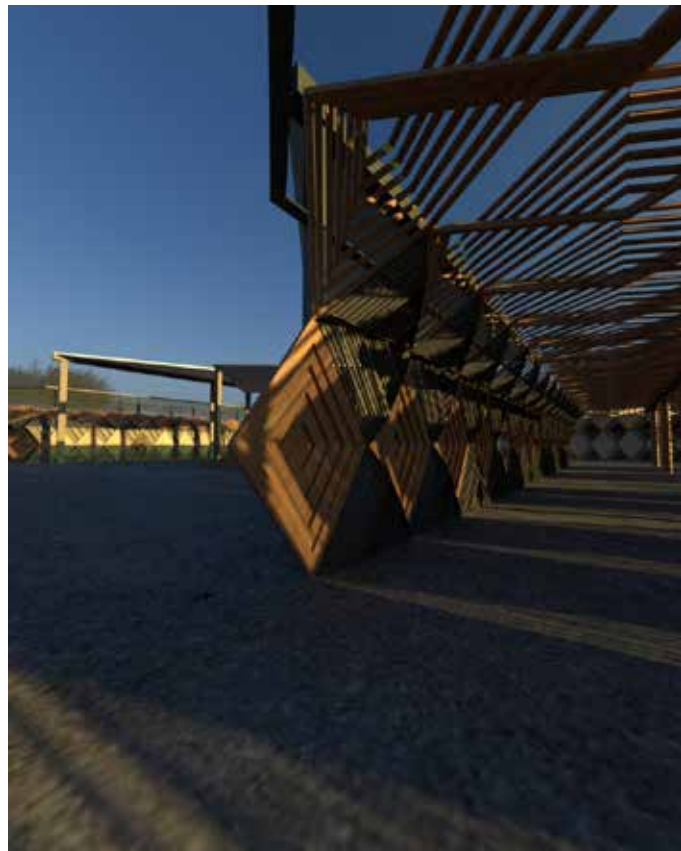


Fig 33.4. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Pacific Centre. Experimenting with Light. 2019

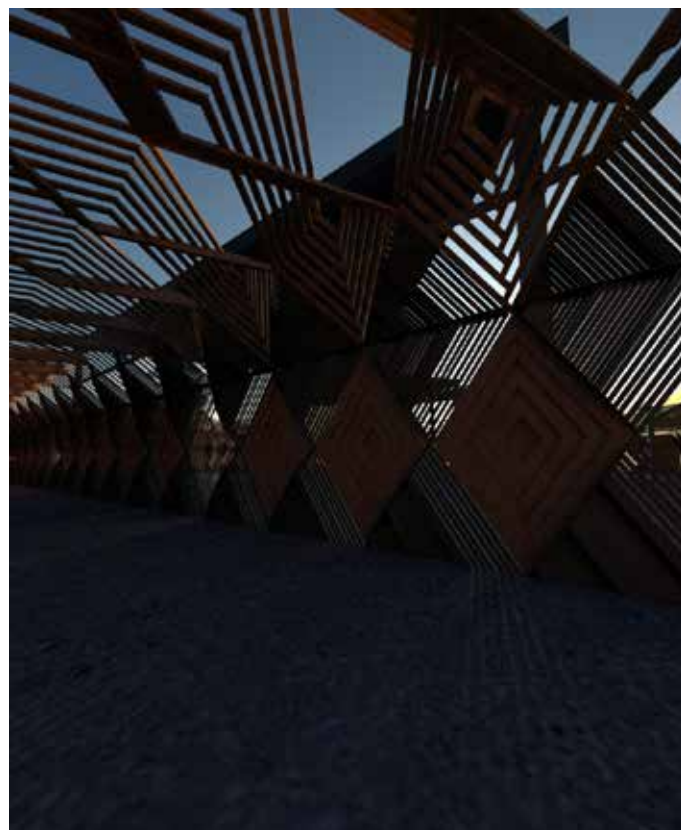
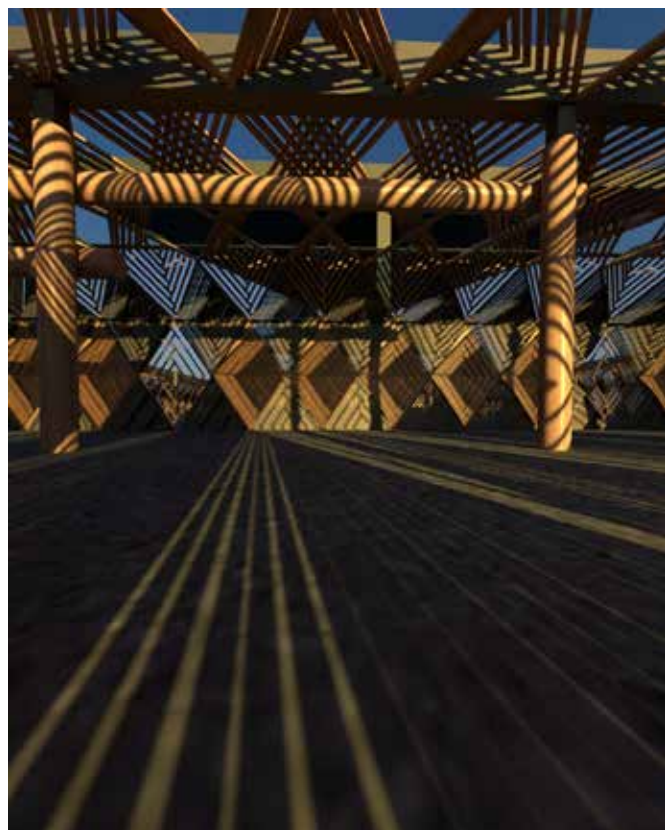
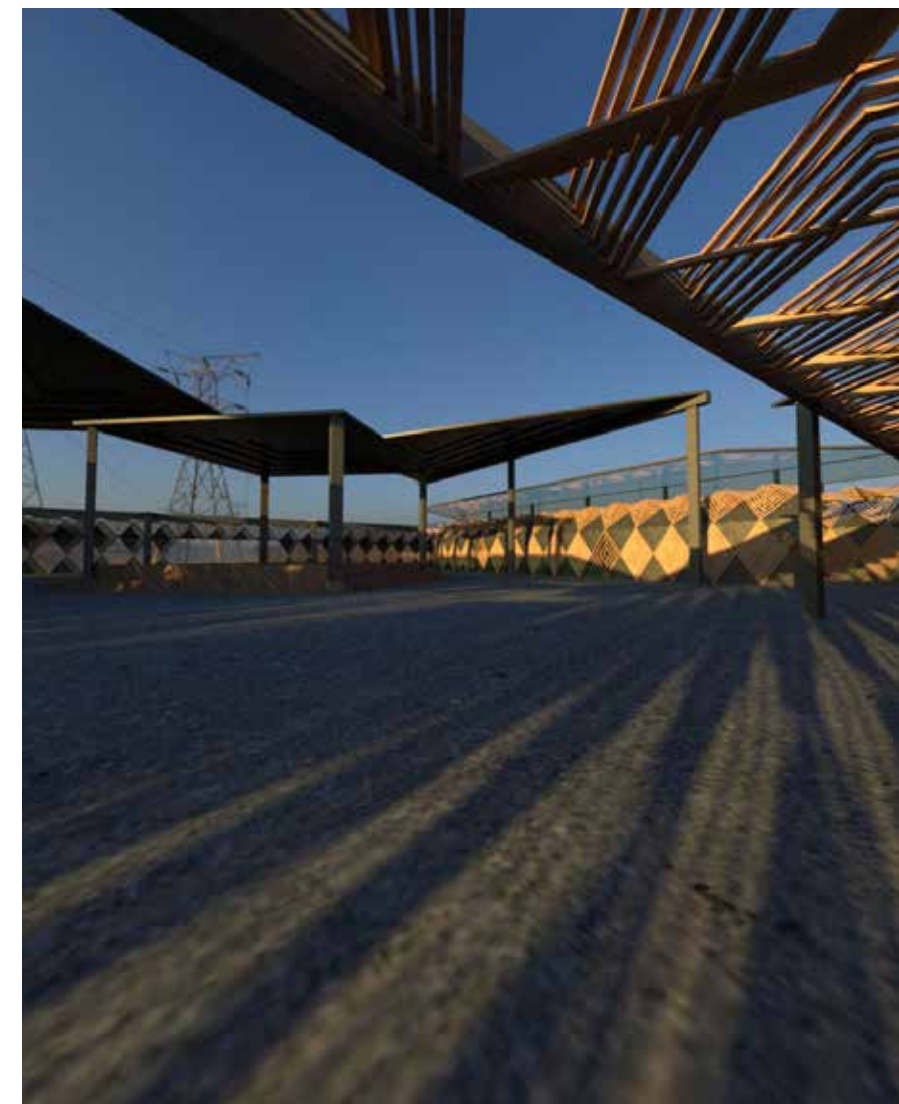


Fig 33.3. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Pacific Centre. Experimenting with Light. 2019



Lalava has a specific form that separates it from other Tongan traditional patterns as its layering and placements of lines create the geometry of its patterns, making it uniquely different from other traditional patterns. Filipe Tohi has successfully showcased this through his sculptures and has created a way of viewing lalava from a different point of view that would be very difficult to see in its purest forms. In terms of moving this research project forward, I decided to design a variety of sculptures that resembled my lalava journey. The designing of these sculptures was not intended to replicate what Filipe Tohi already made but to showcase my identity as a designer – this aspect of the design process was very important for me in terms of how I wanted to bring forth this indigenous art form and present it to a community of people who are just like me and know very little about the subject matter. As a child of South Auckland, I see the influences on our people in terms of culture and traditional knowledge – Western culture heavily influences Polynesian youth through its technology, providing them with access to the wider world. As the world continues to develop and move forward in its technology, I want to create a space that relates our people to the time of our ancestors – a link that bridges two timelines.

As I began to create these sculptures, the thought that always repeated itself in my head was not to duplicate what Filipe Tohi had already made or allow his influence be too obvious in how I shape these sculptures. I reflected on the methods and methodologies I had used up to this point, the lalava tau'olunga, the practice of lalava-making on different surfaces, and how it displays within the churches of Tonga. What Tohi demonstrated through his sculptures was that his forms and lines are straight and are placed at certain angles to form lalava. The large majority of times I have viewed lalava through images; when I saw it in person was it was always wrapped and lashed onto round surfaces. This provided an approach as to how I intend to form these sculptures – as Filipe used straight lines to create lalava sculptures, I decided to capture the roundness as a representation of the movement that goes into lalava-making. By using Rhinoceros 3D modelling, I began to experiment with how these possible sculptures will turn out (figure 35.1, 35.2, 35.3, 35.4, 35.5, 35.6) as well as experimenting with light, shadow and material (figure 36.1, 36.2, 36.3, 36.4) The thought process that resulted in the outcome of these concept sculptures was through my memory of my research journey leading up to this point, as I looked into movement, how it is displayed, the complexity of lines, and the confusion it created for me in terms of attempting to follow and create patterns. Moving forward, I began thinking about why this lalava is so important to me and ways of providing a space for people to learn about this indigenous art the same way I did while undertaking this research project.



Fig 34.1. Latu. Vena. Site Analysis. Digital Photography. Perspective of David Lange Park and Mangere Town Centre from Desired Area of where to Place Project. 2019

Fig 34.2. Latu, Vena. Site Analysis. Digital Drawing. New Site Plan of David Lange Park for Project. 2019



New Pathway # 2, next to main entrance road.

New Pathways manoeuvre around trees and will have sculptures and small pavilions

Desired Placement of Project

New Pathway #1, next to main road

Fig 34.4. Latu, Vena. Site Analysis. Digital Photography. Prspective of Pathway #1 Leading to Desired Area for Interactive Pavilion. 2019



Fig 34.3. Latu, Vena. Site Analysis. Digital Photography. Prspective of Pathway #2 Leading to Desired Area for Interactive Pavilion. 2019

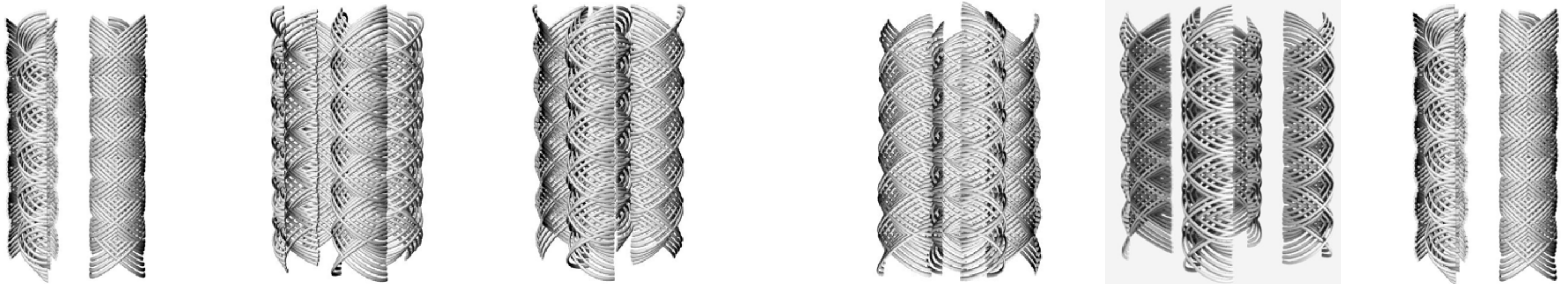


Fig 35.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Concept 1. 2019



Fig 35.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Concept 2. 2019



Fig 35.3. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Concept 3. 2019

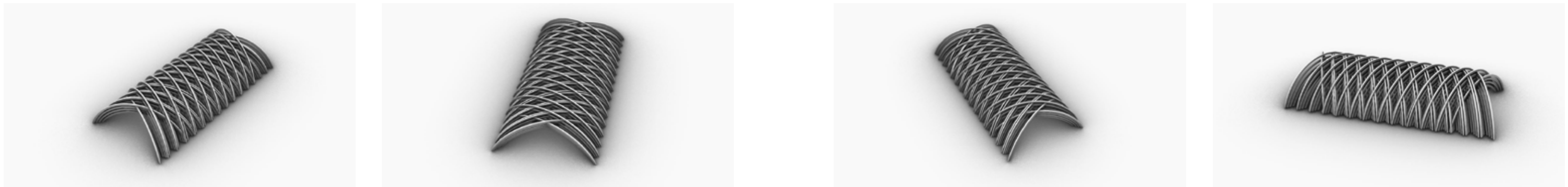


Fig 35.4. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Concept 4. 2019



Fig 35.5. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Concept 5. 2019

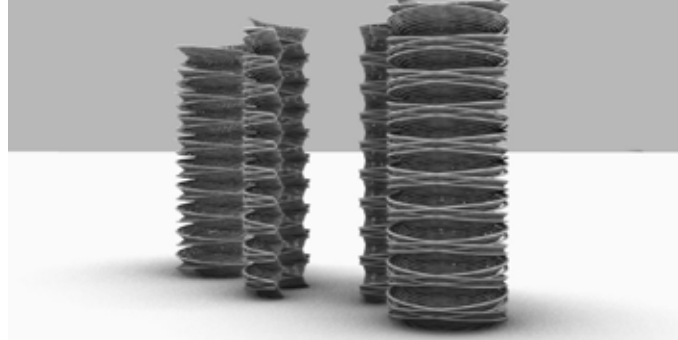
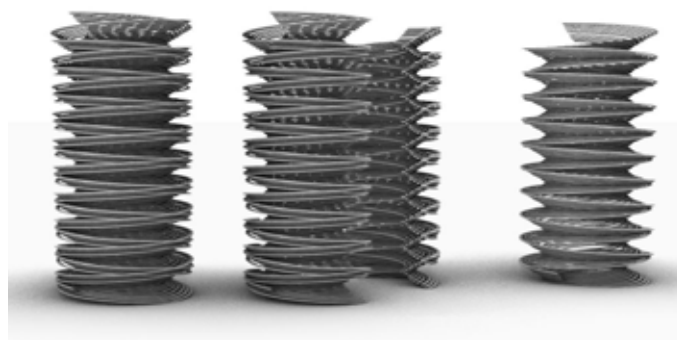
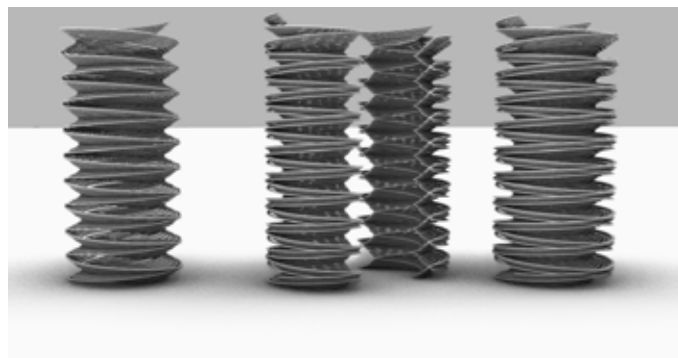
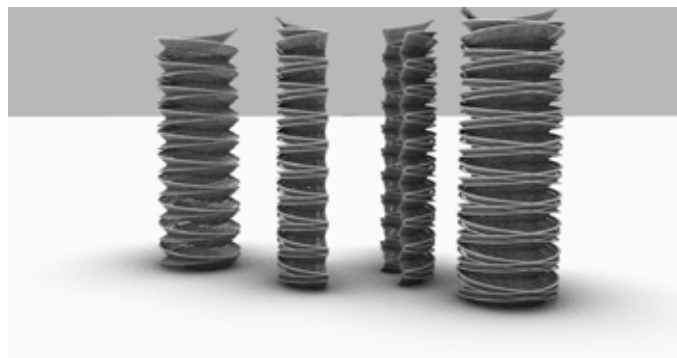


Fig 35.6. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Concept 6. 2019

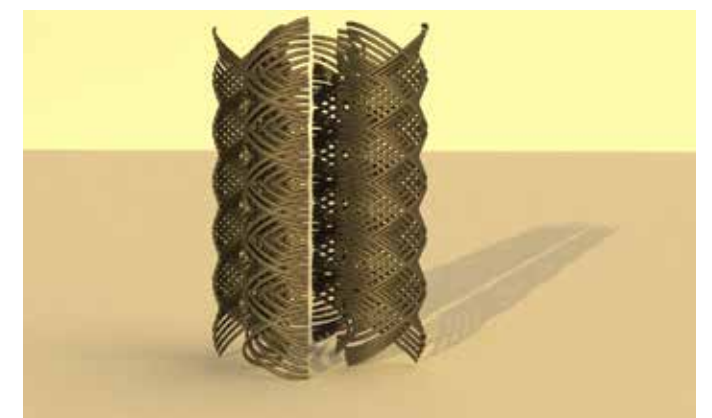
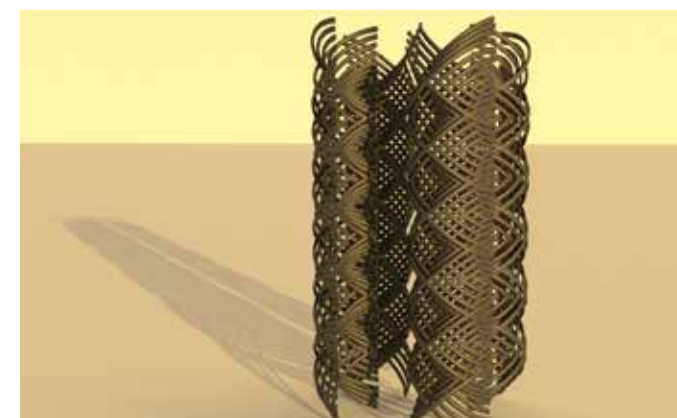
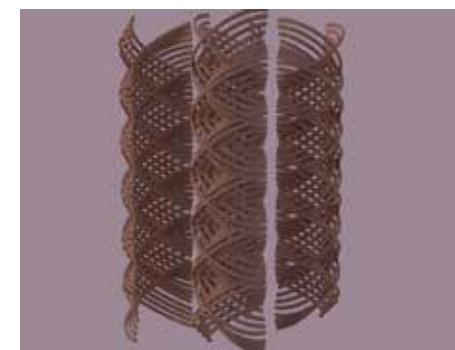
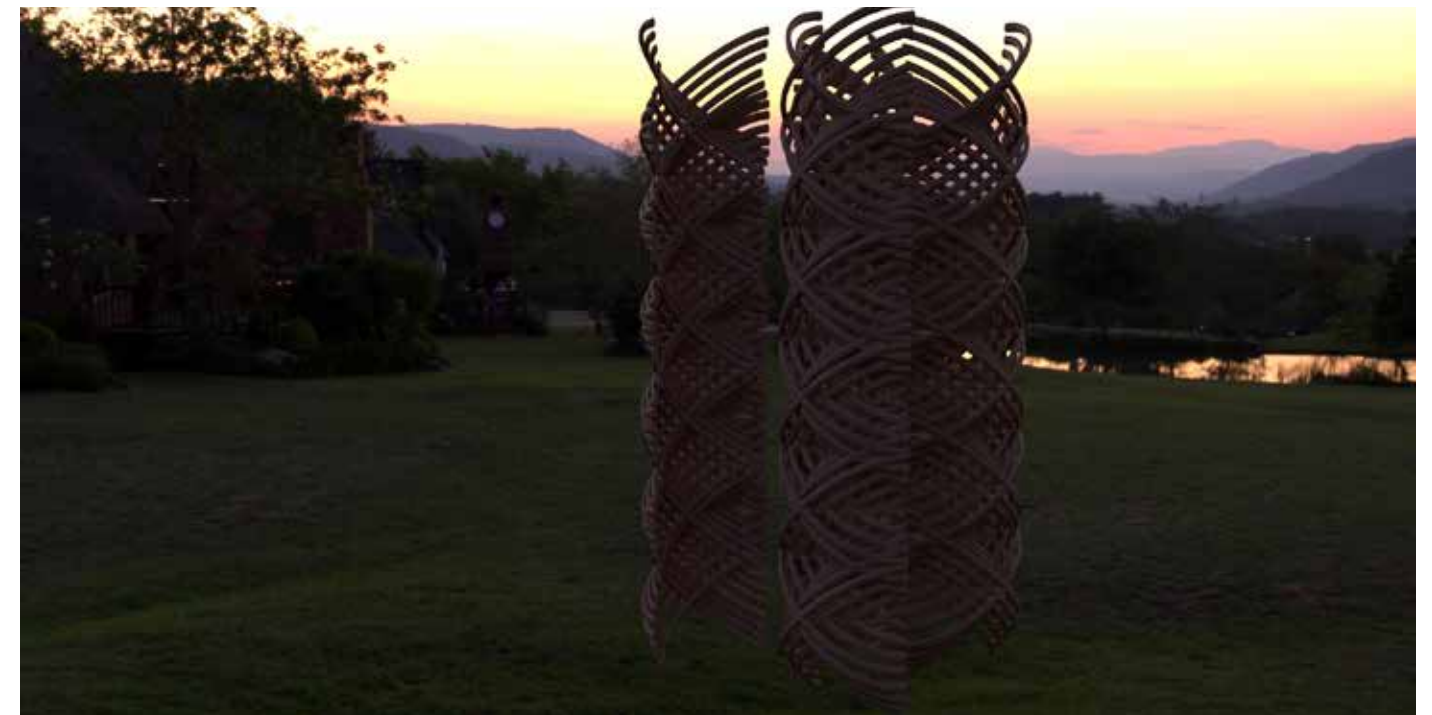


Fig 36.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Concept 1. Experimenting with Light, Shadow, Materials, and Water Reflection. 2019

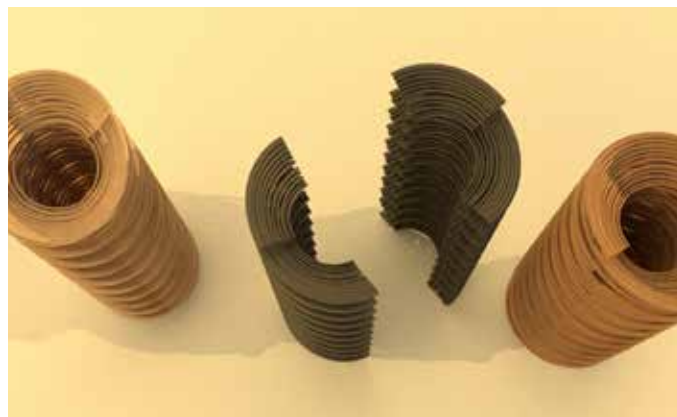
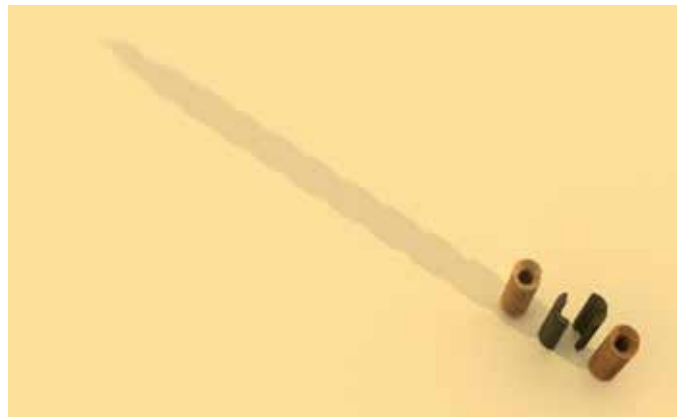
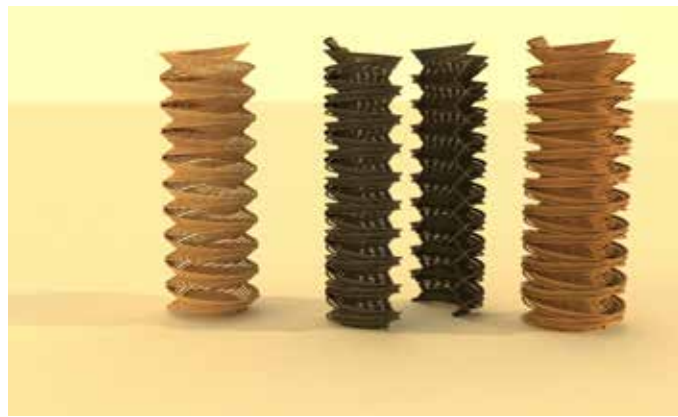
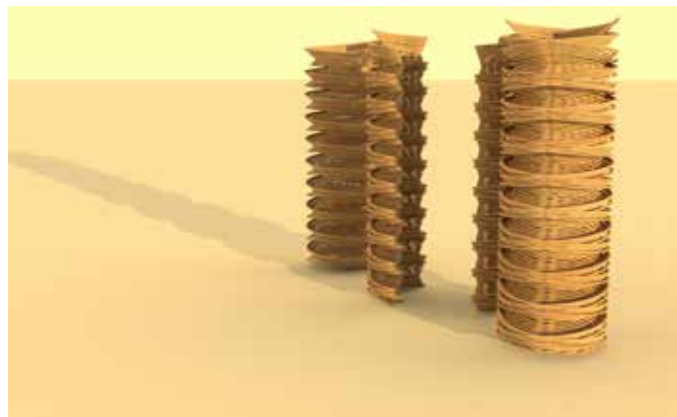


Fig 36.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Concept 2. Experimenting with Light, Shadow, Materials, and Water Reflection. 2019

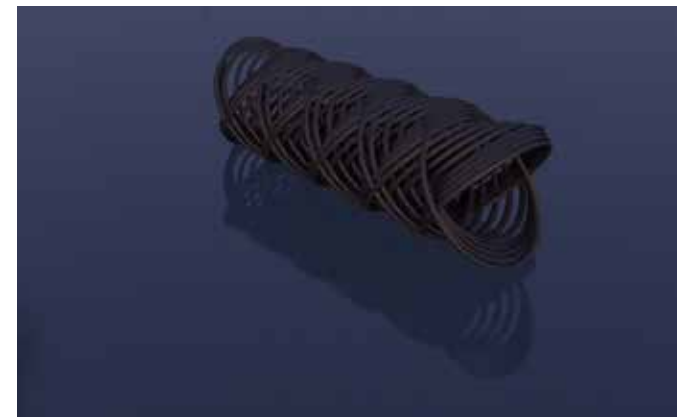
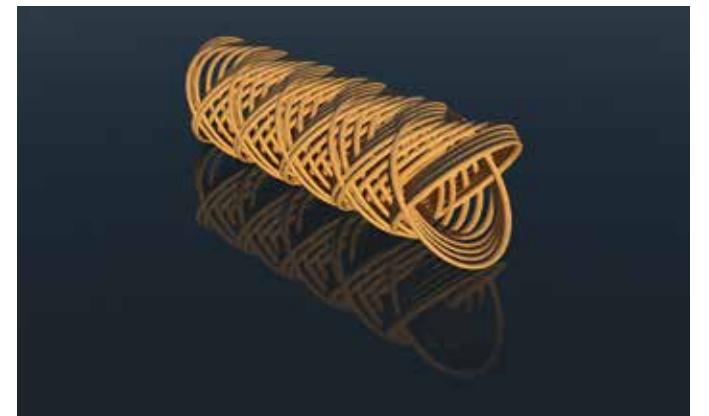


Fig 36.3. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Concept 3. Experimenting with Light, Shadow, Materials, and Water Reflection. 2019

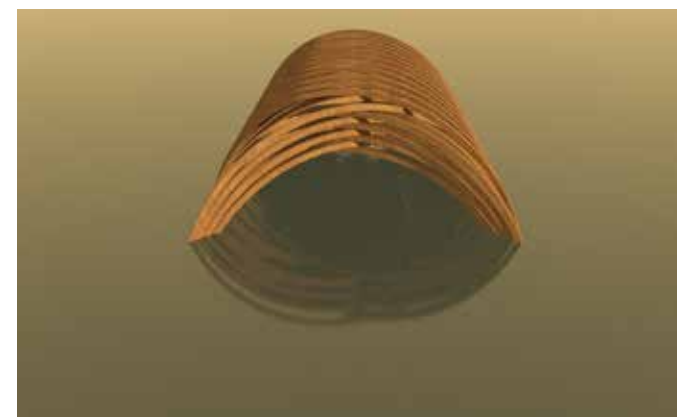
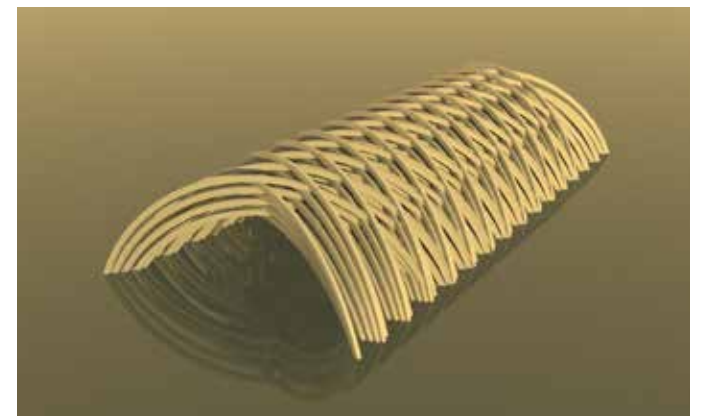
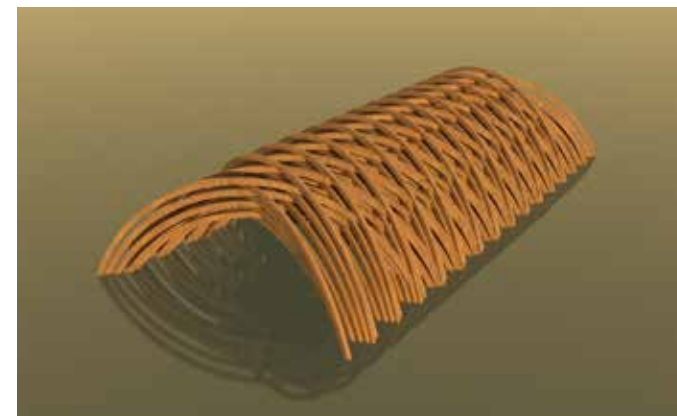


Fig 36.4. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Concept 4. Experimenting with Light, Shadow, Materials, and Water Reflection. 2019

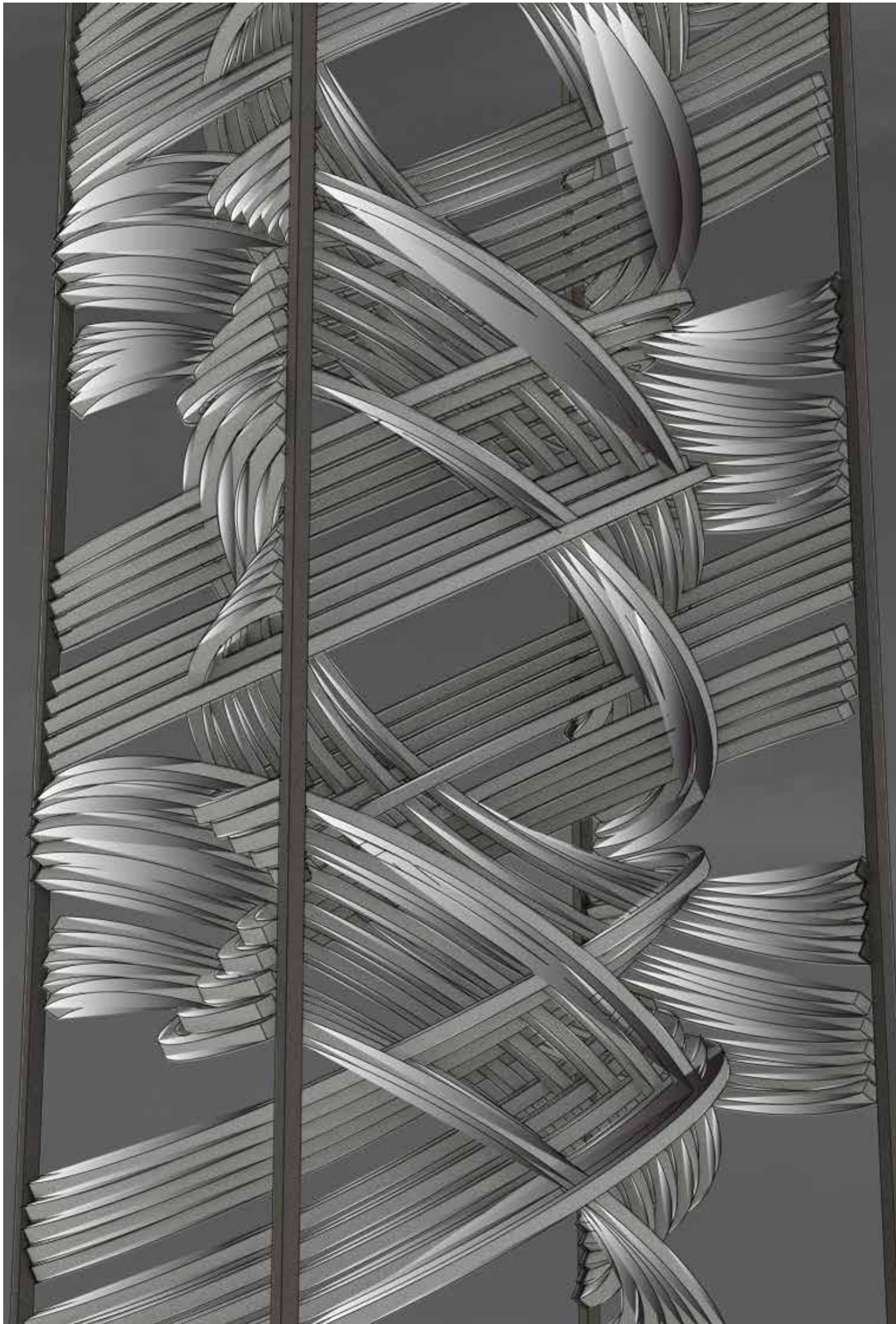
The Outcome

Sculptures provide a sense of freedom of how abstract my approach can be; it also influences the space it occupies as it may create a reaction – capturing the attention of the public. There is an effect that a sculpture has on space, that a structural pavilion fails to provide – it generates interest and creates a conversation about topics that may not concern the space that it inhabits. By inserting lalava into David Lange Park, it connects two separate worlds – one being a park that hosts a variety of activities and the other being that of an unknown indigenous art amongst the younger Tongan and Pacific communities. The idea of generating conversation inspired how I could have these sculptures to not just be objects within the park but to also interact with the public – an indication of how our ancestors educated themselves through making and verbal interaction. This medium points out my approach to learning about lalava and methods and methodologies I have used to make my discoveries as well as the readings that have influenced my understanding of Polynesian culture.

Seven out of the eight sculptures are designed in forms where the lines are lashed into a spiralling embodiment, thus creating a repetitive and never-ending amount of patterns and lines. The remaining sculpture, I had taken the same approach as Filipe Tohi, where I would use straight lines to create the sculpture all the while also creating a lalava sculpture unfamiliar to his. By designing the sculptures this way, it enabled us to view lalava with the absence of the pole, giving lalava an interior, providing a never-before opportunity of viewing lalava from within. I have interpreted this interior as a form of *vā* as it is the space in between therefore resulting in me cutting four of these sculptures in half allowing visitors to intersect the *vā* similarly to the *vaka* intersecting the space between sky and sea. The absence of the pole investigates a hidden aspect of lalava – entry into the interior of lalava, allowing a physical view of lalava from within. The ideal materials used to create these sculptures are steel by moulding and bending pieces together and oak wood where it would go through a process of steam bending to get a grasp of the round shape. One of these sculptures I have designed it into a form of a tunnel like pavilion as a representation of how the interior of the tunnels would begin to lash and form lalava patterns. I have implemented poles onto two of the sculptures for the sole purpose of lalava making. The design creates a space for social interaction through making, putting the participant in an auto-ethnographic position, allowing them to experience an unfamiliar time as well as bringing a little bit of life back into this dying art.

Fig 37.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Final. 2019





Alongside these sculptures, I also designed a shelter space (fig 37.11) as a means of having a space to cool down as David Lange Park is a space that involves a lot of play and exercise yet lacks an area for people to rest up afterwards. Aspects of the fale have inspired the design of the shelter as the fale still uses lalava as a tribute to the time of our ancestors. I have incorporated a variety of poles within this sheltering space allowing the public to use and make lalava. Three of these poles also include a high platform where to gain access is by ladder – by incorporating these bring an indication of the different levels our ancestors would have to be when connecting materials to build the fale and vakas.

The placements of these sculptures within site were strategically based on the hand and arm movements of the lalava tau'olunga. To bring this into fruition, I intended to create footpaths within the form of the hand gestures of the lalava tau'olungas circular motions. The absent of the footpath allows a natural curiosity of one's surrounding, not allowing any particular order of where to move but to proceed accordingly to what intrigues the viewer. The placement of these sculptures (fig 37.12) is important as it allows the viewer to wander around David Lange in a circular motion similar to the lalava tau'olunga (fig 9). The viewer's interaction with these sculptures creates a metaphoric lalava lashing around the site as people manoeuvre around leaving behind an invisible trail or line that may intersect with another individuals trail – lalava making through walking.

Fig 37.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture
Final. 2019



Fig 37.3. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture
Final. 2019

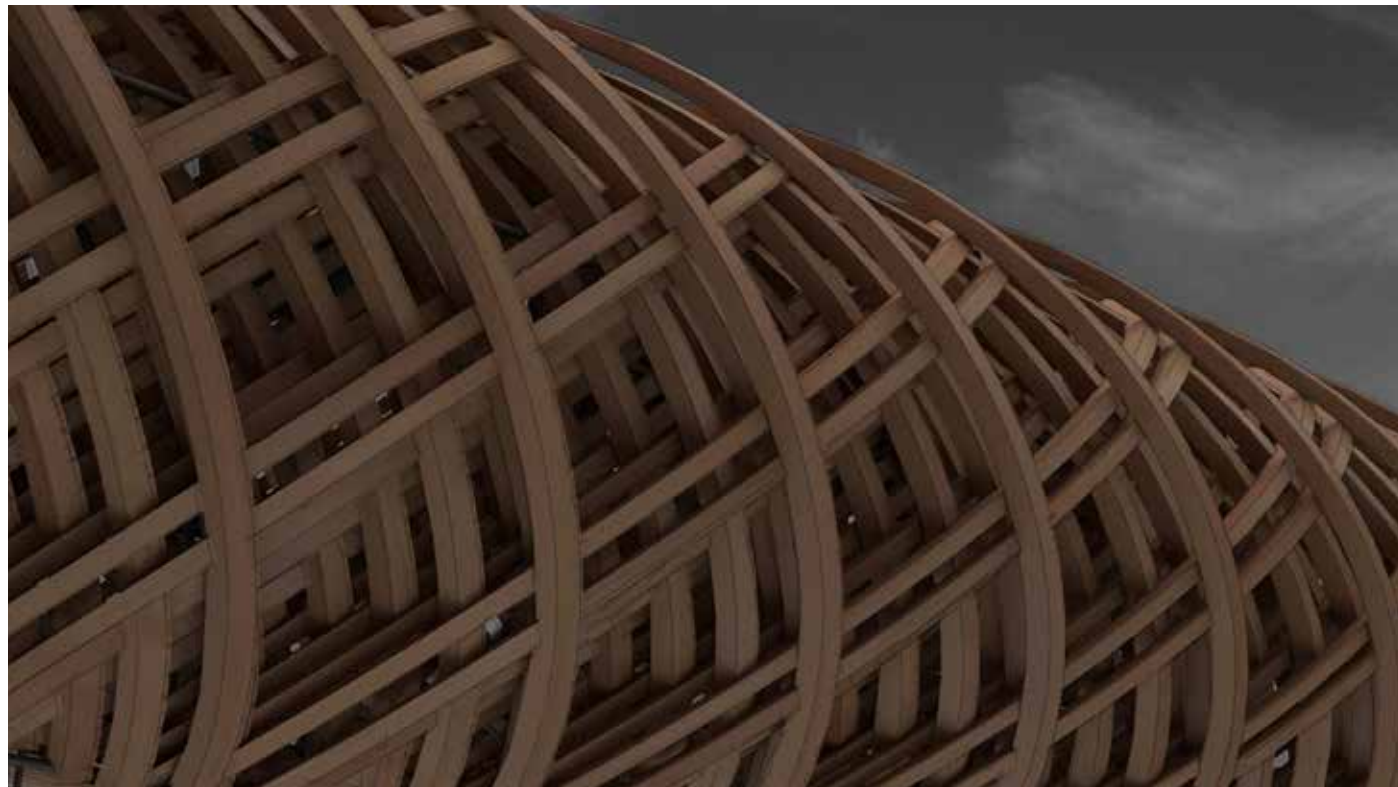


Fig 37.4. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture
Final. 2019



Fig 37.5. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture
Final. 2019

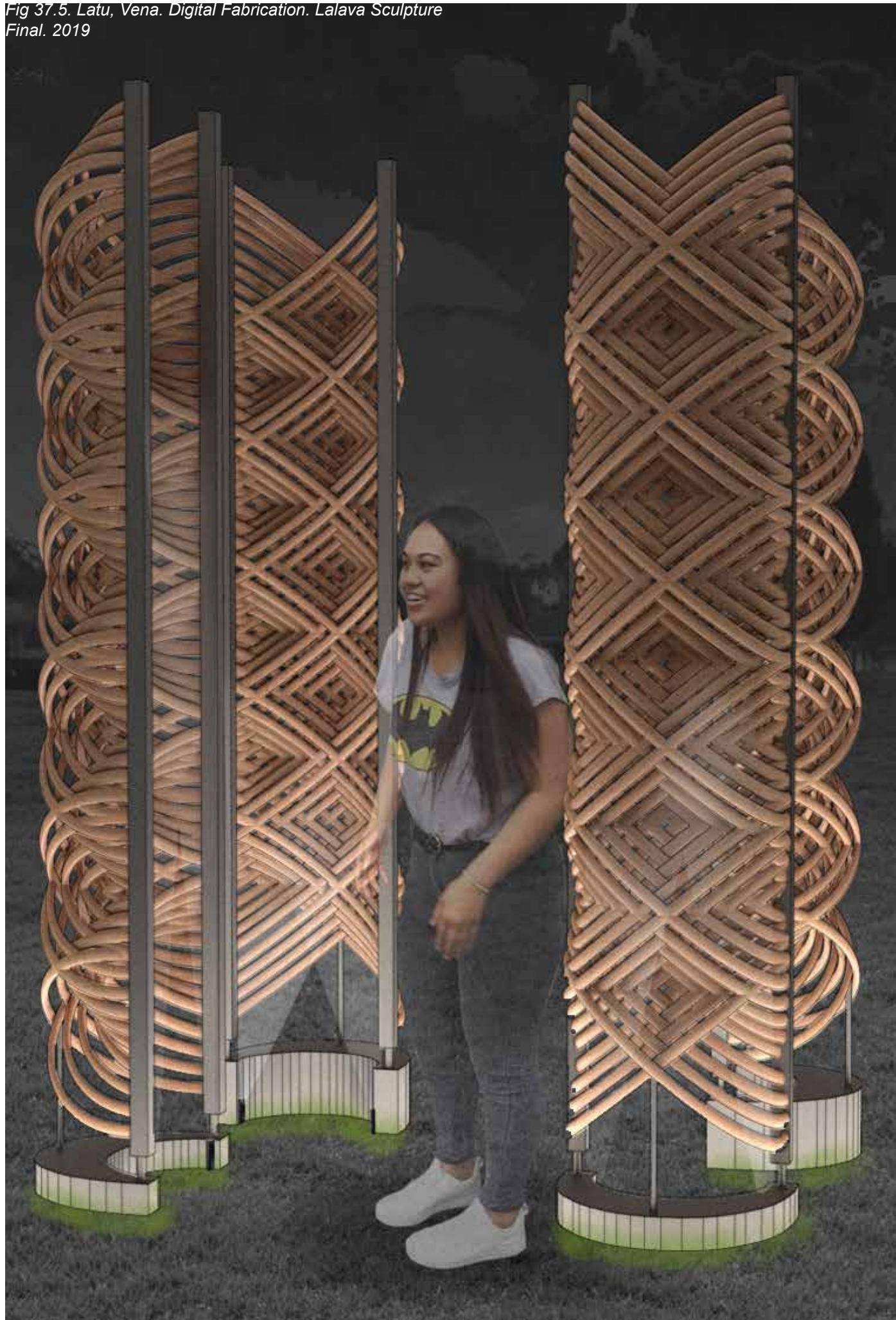


Fig 37.6. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture
Final. 2019



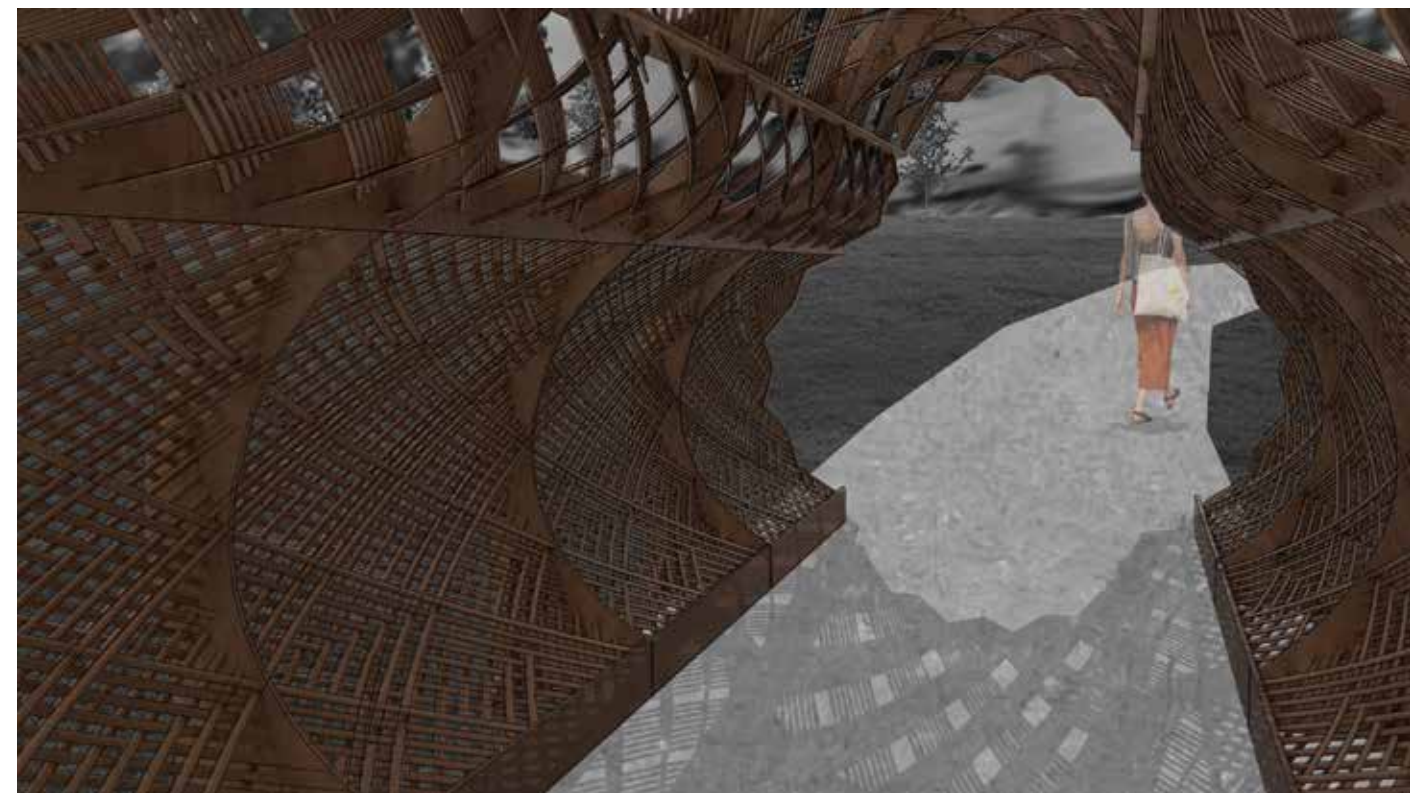
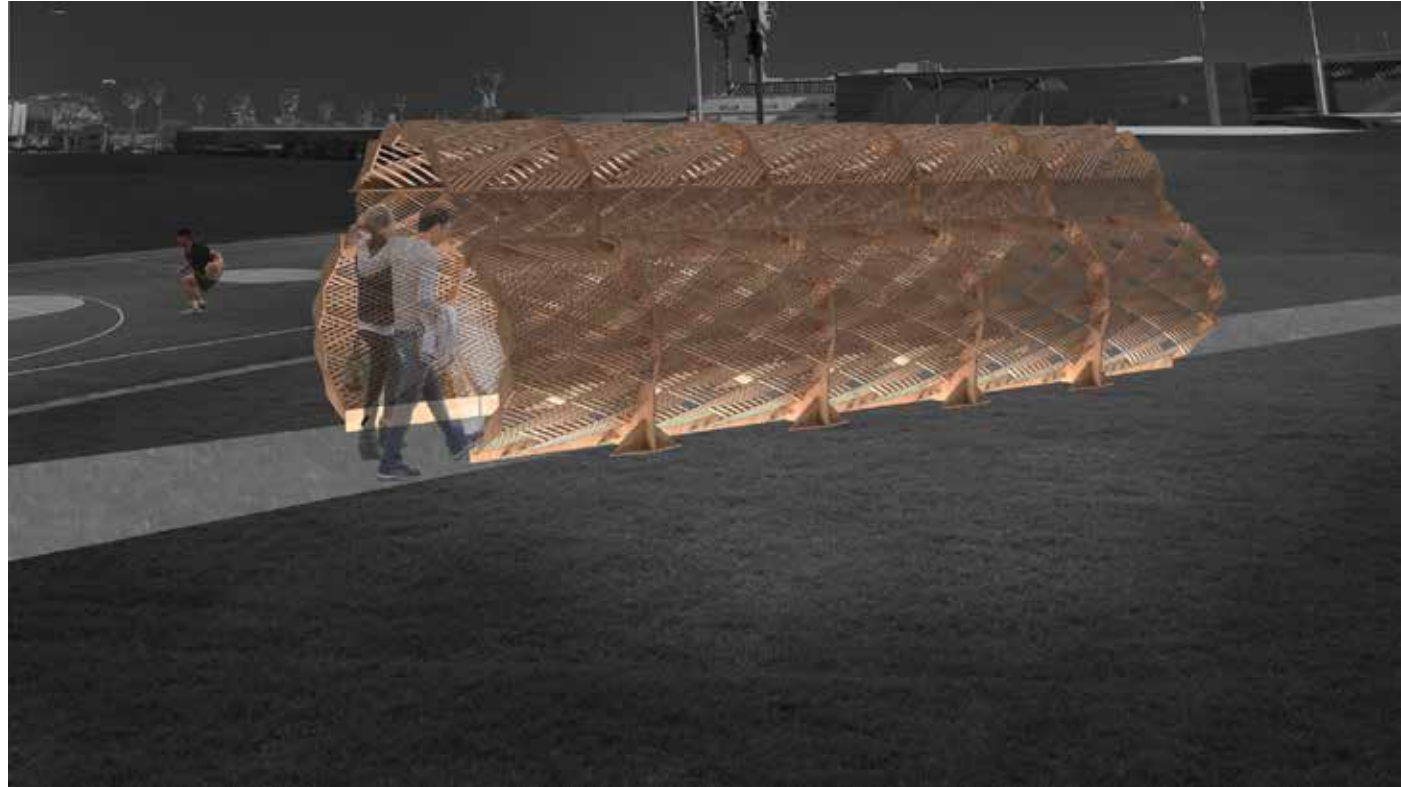


Fig 37.7. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Final. 2019

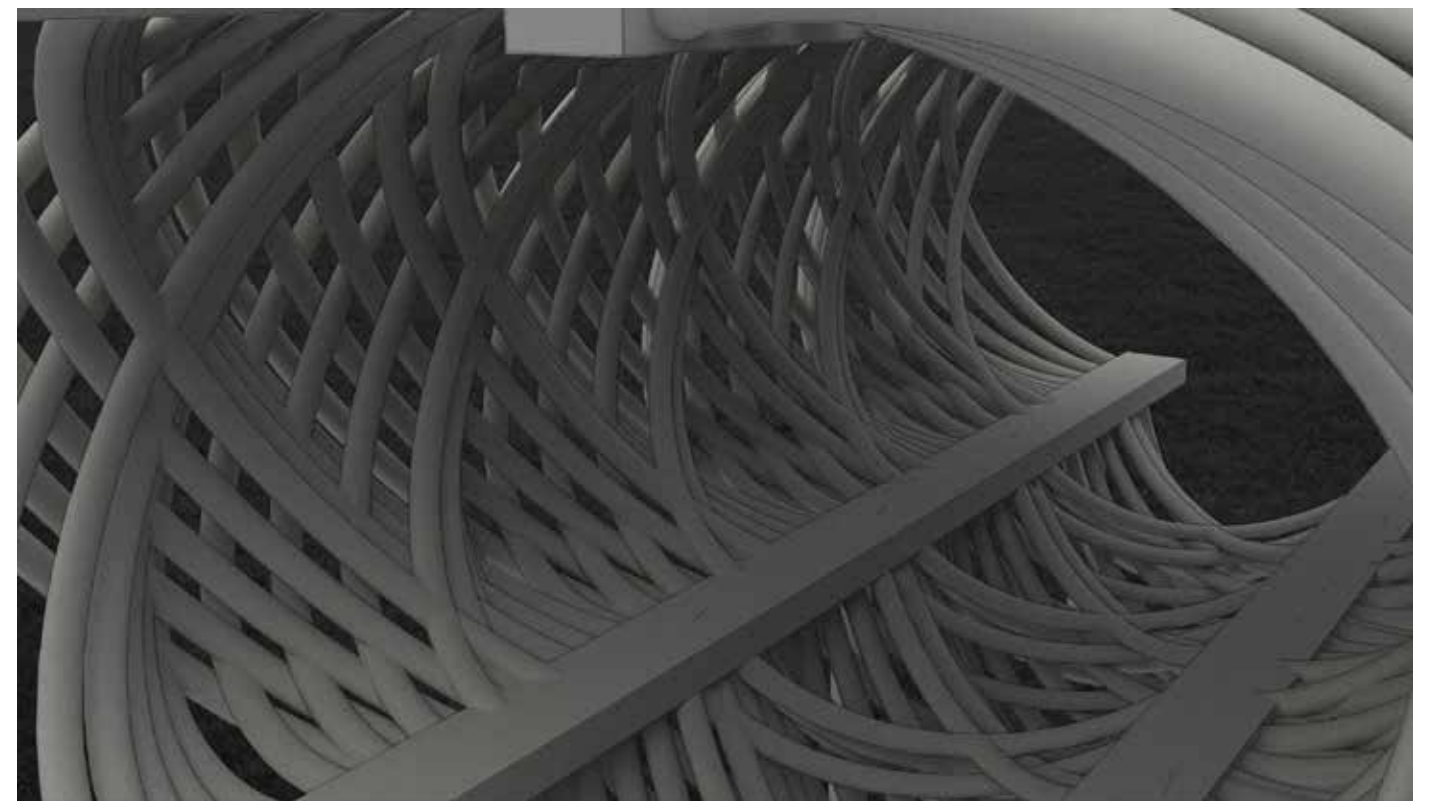
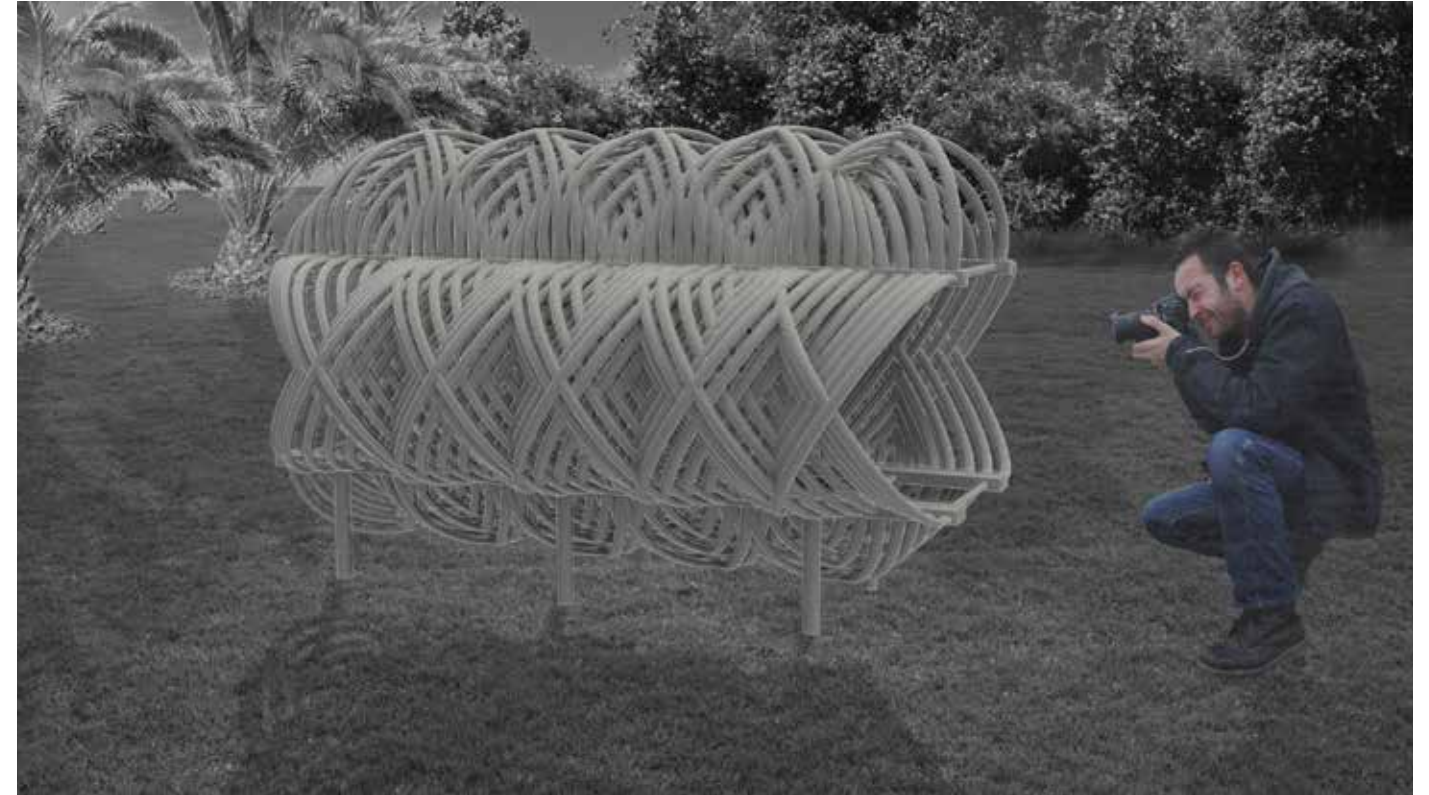


Fig 37.8. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Final. 2019



Fig 37.9. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Final. 2019



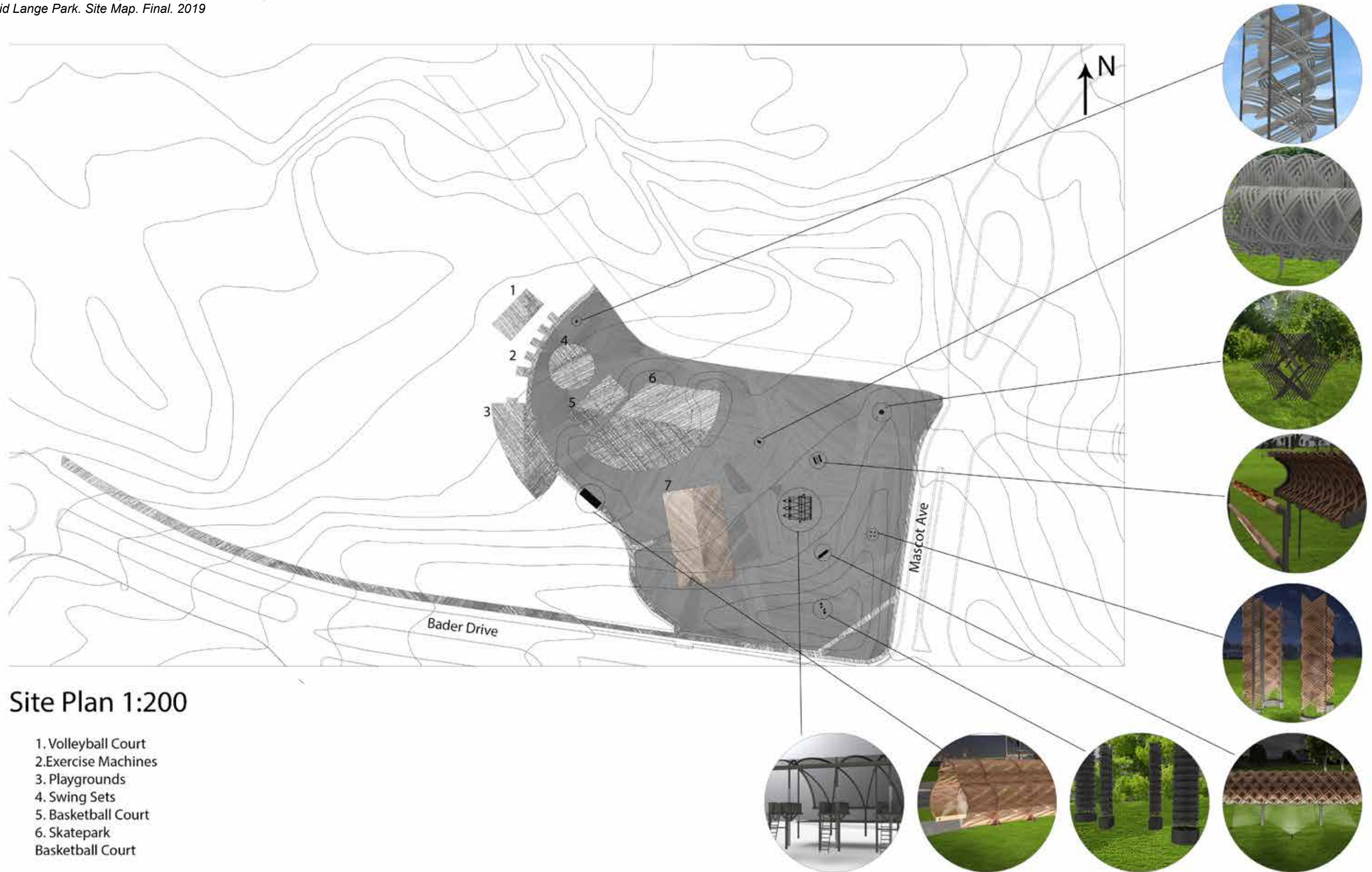
Fig 37.10. Latu, Vena. Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture Final. 2019





Fig 37.11. Latu, Vena. *Digital Fabrication. Lalava Sculpture*
Final. 2019

Fig 37.12. Latu, Vena. Digital Drawing. Lalava Sculptures Placement within David Lange Park. Site Map. Final. 2019



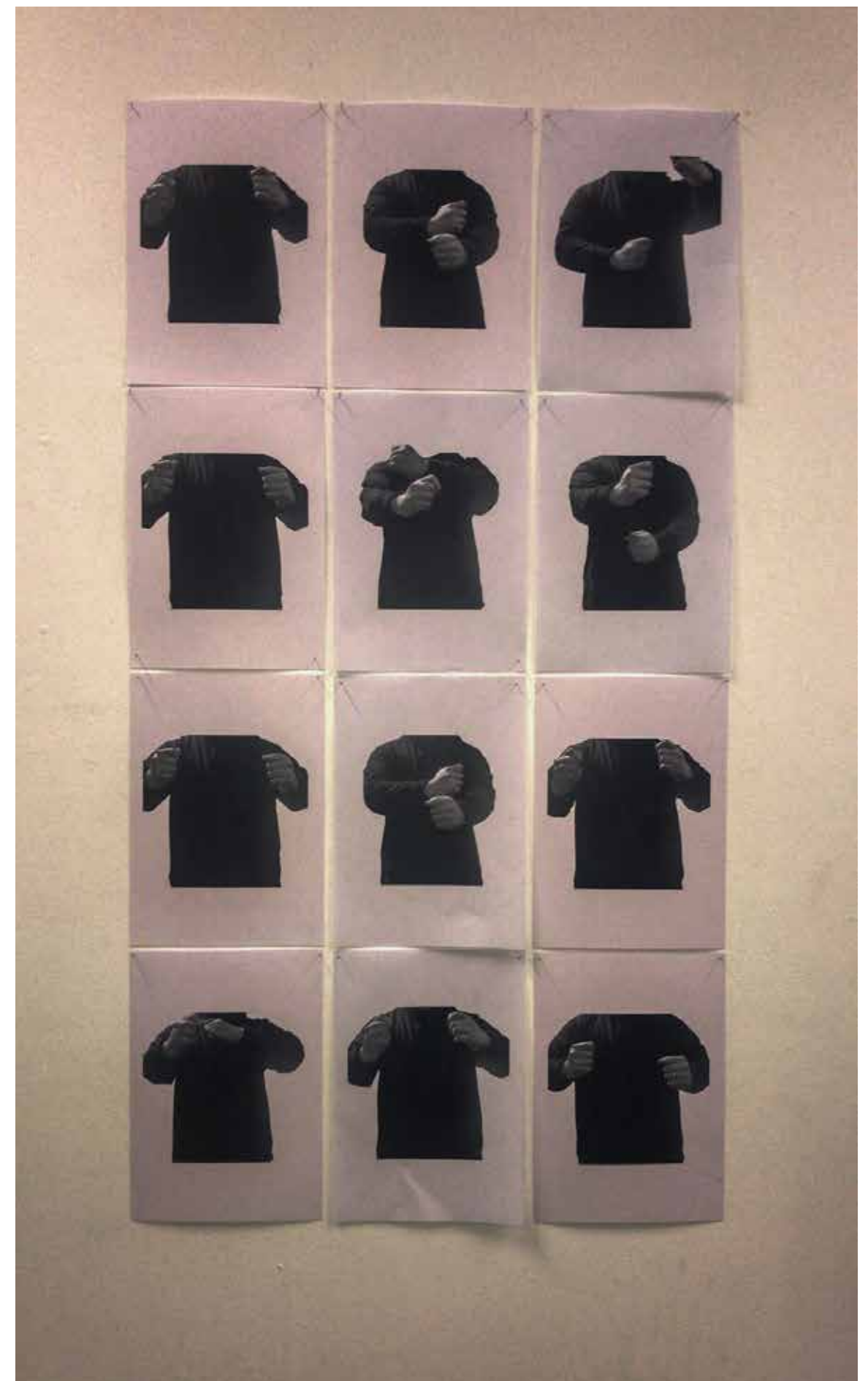
Conclusion

This thesis unravels a Tongan cultural understanding through lalava; providing a link to the past through the language of pattern and the phenomenology of making. Throughout this research project, I have used auto-ethnographic and practice-based methods as a means of uncovering the cultural knowledge developed by my ancestors. I began this research project as a means of finding myself as a Tongan as I have always felt lost within that aspect of cultural identity. For me growing up in Aotearoa, I had seen and heard Tongan culture but never participated in it, therefore, I lacked a genuine cultural experience. Carrying out this research has helped me to understand that Tongan culture is more than what I see but is a way of life. Despite the heavy influence Western technology have on Tonga today, Tongan people are still heavily intertwined with their culture as they further interpreted patterns that are traditionally implemented onto the ngatu and have applied them onto other entities such as contemporary art and structural forms. This indicates that culture is a large part of Tongan identity and as time goes by and materials change, Tongan people have found new ways to express or interpret cultural traditions.

The making of lalava is a coming together of genealogy (lines) both metaphorically and socially as the lashed lines symbolise an ancestral connection. Through the experience of lalava making outside of its traditional approach, I experienced a phenomenology that provided an insight into the daily lives of my ancestors influencing the thought process that went into the development stages. What I have learnt in this journey is the social aspect of lalava informs a characteristic that depicts a natural approach amongst Pacific people in terms of 'art' or general approach to daily life. As an art, lalava has allowed me to uncover insights into the daily lives of my ancestors and interpret those phenomenological narratives into a spatial context; strengthening my understanding of Tongan Culture beyond what it was before.









Appendix

Field Research on Tongan Churches

Three of these chapels showcased the traditional timber-framing of the traditional fale with the incorporation of lalava. The Basilica Sagato Anthony of Padua and Ma'ufanga Cathedral was not built using the traditional fale but still provided a sense of its ancient history as its architectural style drew inspiration from classic patterns such as the kupesi. The Basilica in particular also fuses the traditions of mat weaving onto its timber framing similarly to how lalava binds the timber framing.

The Moulton Memorial Chapel, The Sia'atoutai Theological College Chapel, and The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Pelehake are the three churches I visited that contain lalava. The Moulton Chapel located in the village of Toloa was my first encounter with lalava which was very special in the sense that it happened in Tonga, but also I spent the past four years researching the art and had never come into contact with it. The lalava was bound on the poles around the ceiling that stretched from the bottom of the ceiling to the tip of the top of the roof. The lalava was bound and lashed together by the students of Tupou College, indicating that the ancient art was taught in schools. The lalava are decorated with seashells which combined with the dark space shaped by the roof created an atmosphere of the night sky where the shells represented stars; the horizon of the night that guided our navigating ancestors. I interpreted this as a connection to the navigational method of reading stars which also connects to the name of the village (Toloa) as it was the name of wild duck that outlined the Southern Cross.

The Sia'atoutai Theological chapel was the oldest building I've encountered during my time in Tonga as it was built in 1860 and had undergone many renovations since then. The interior of the chapel has been very well looked after as the timber framing seemed almost new, which shows the importance of taking care of culture. There was a historical narrative to the lalava as it used only one coloured kafa. According to the principle of the college, before tufunga would use two different coloured kafa to bind lalava, our ancestors would use only one colour Churches built using the fale-style architecture for me indicates the importance of keeping these old traditions alive – as religion is a sacred part of Tongan culture this allows the residence to have access to these traditional structures and lalava.

From my observation of the lalava and interior of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Pelehake it is the younger of three fale-style churches I visited. This church is very sacred to its community as you are allowed access only during service, as it is closed before and after. What made the Pelehake Wesleyan Church stand out for me in compared to the other two was the use of lalava was not overshadowed by the atmosphere of the architecture, where it didn't seem like a secondary aspect but the main attraction of the structure. The lalava is used to lash the joints of each concrete beams; therefore, the lalava (fig) on display isn't there to connect and bind materials together but rather exist with the purpose of decoration. The day I visited The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Pelehake, I was in the middle of a funeral to which required a lot out of me in terms of 'time.' Luckily there was a service held at 5:30 in the morning, which also meant I had to get up at 3:30 am to make it in on time. It was almost a bit of a shock because I believed I had come to understand the seriousness of religion in Tonga after my first Sunday, but this had put an entirely new perspective on the influence of Christianity for me.

These Three churches has modernised “the traditional Tongan and Lauan architecture”⁵³ as it still utilises the lalava and thatching as means of shaping the structure.

The Basilica Sagato Anthony of Padua and St Mary's Cathedral, Tonga (Ma'ufanga Cathedral or Cathedral of Nuku'alofa or Malia Tupu Imakulata) don't use the traditional fale architecture but still utilises different aspects of Tongan culture to influence the design outcome of these churches. The Basilica Sagato Anthony of Padua circulates a variety of triangular shapes to form its roof to which the interior outlines these triangles through its timber framing thus creating kupesi patterns. The joints of these framings were covered similar to lalava but using weaving materials incorporating a new use of the weaving mats outside of its norm. The St Mary's Cathedral at first glance I am able to tell that it is the most recent built church in Tonga. The interior of St Mary's Cathedral also forms kupesi shapes through its steel framing as well as its layering of timber. The modern approach to architecture in Tonga utilises the kupesi as a design concept as to how the churches are built in this day and age.

52 Talei, Charmaine 'Ilaiu. “Understanding the diffusion of coconut architecture Through an analysis of Thatching applied on Traditional Tongan and lauan (fijian) architectures.”: 71

Fig 38.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Moulton Chapel. Tonga. 2019

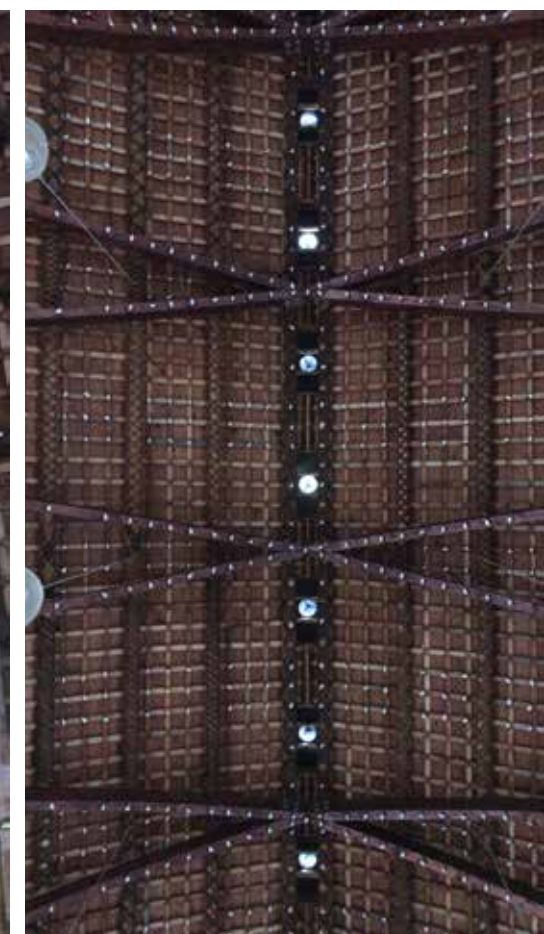
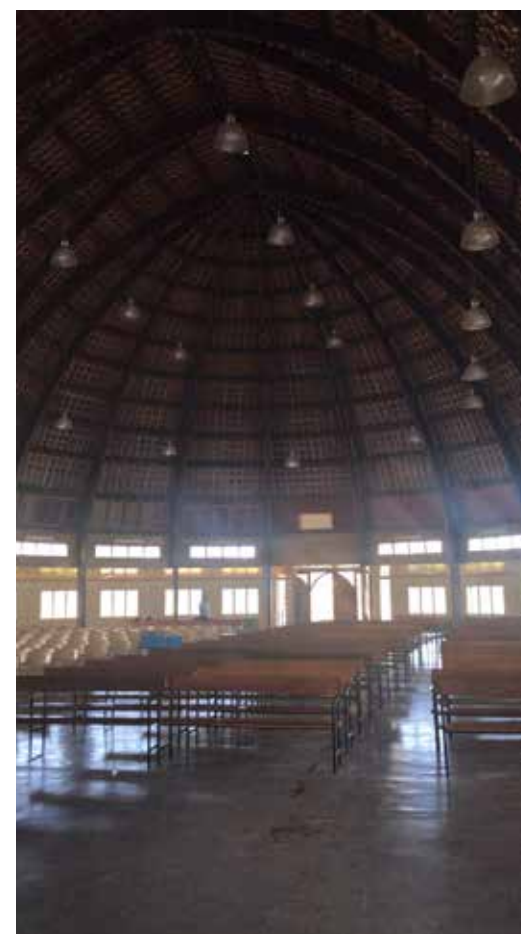
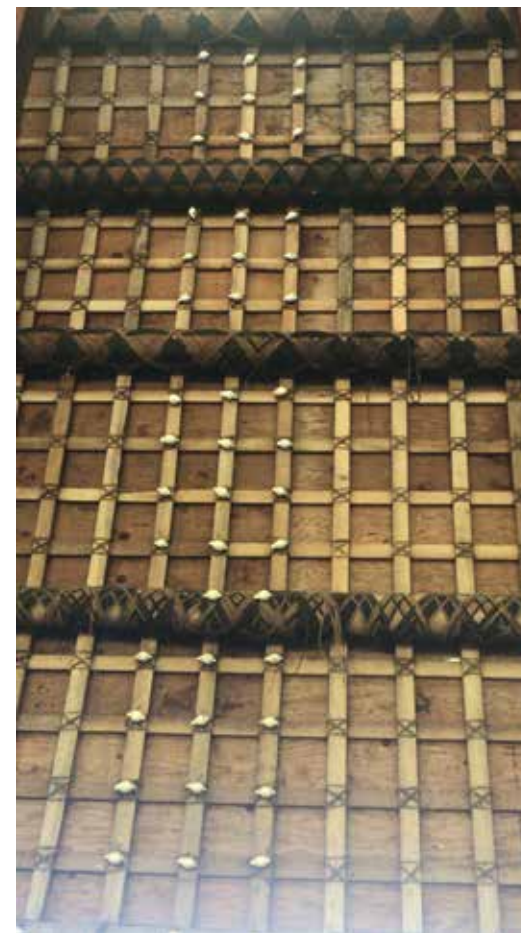
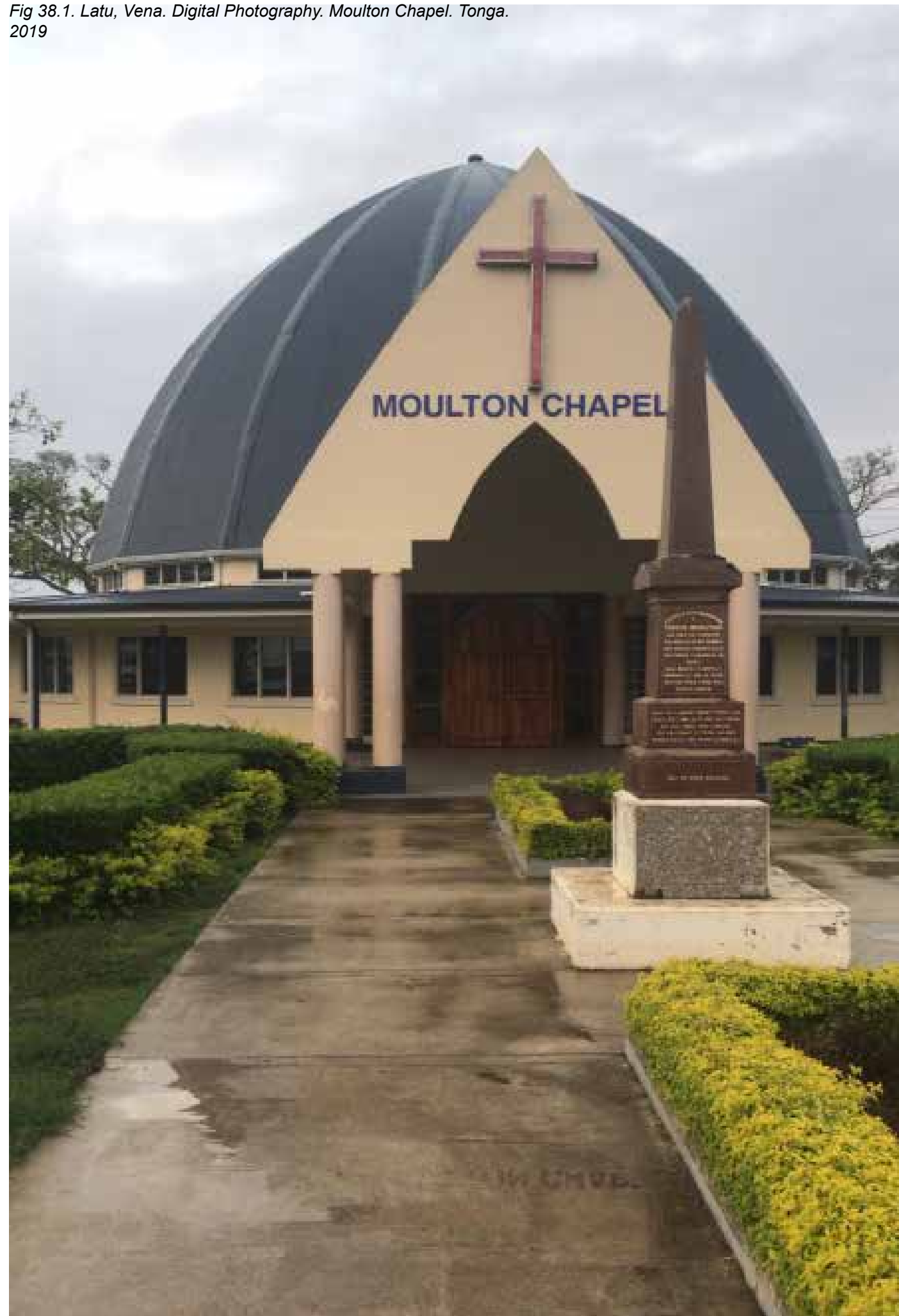


Fig 38.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Moulton Chapel Interior and Timber Framing. Tonga. 2019



Fig 38.3. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Moulton Chapel Lalava. Tonga. 2019.

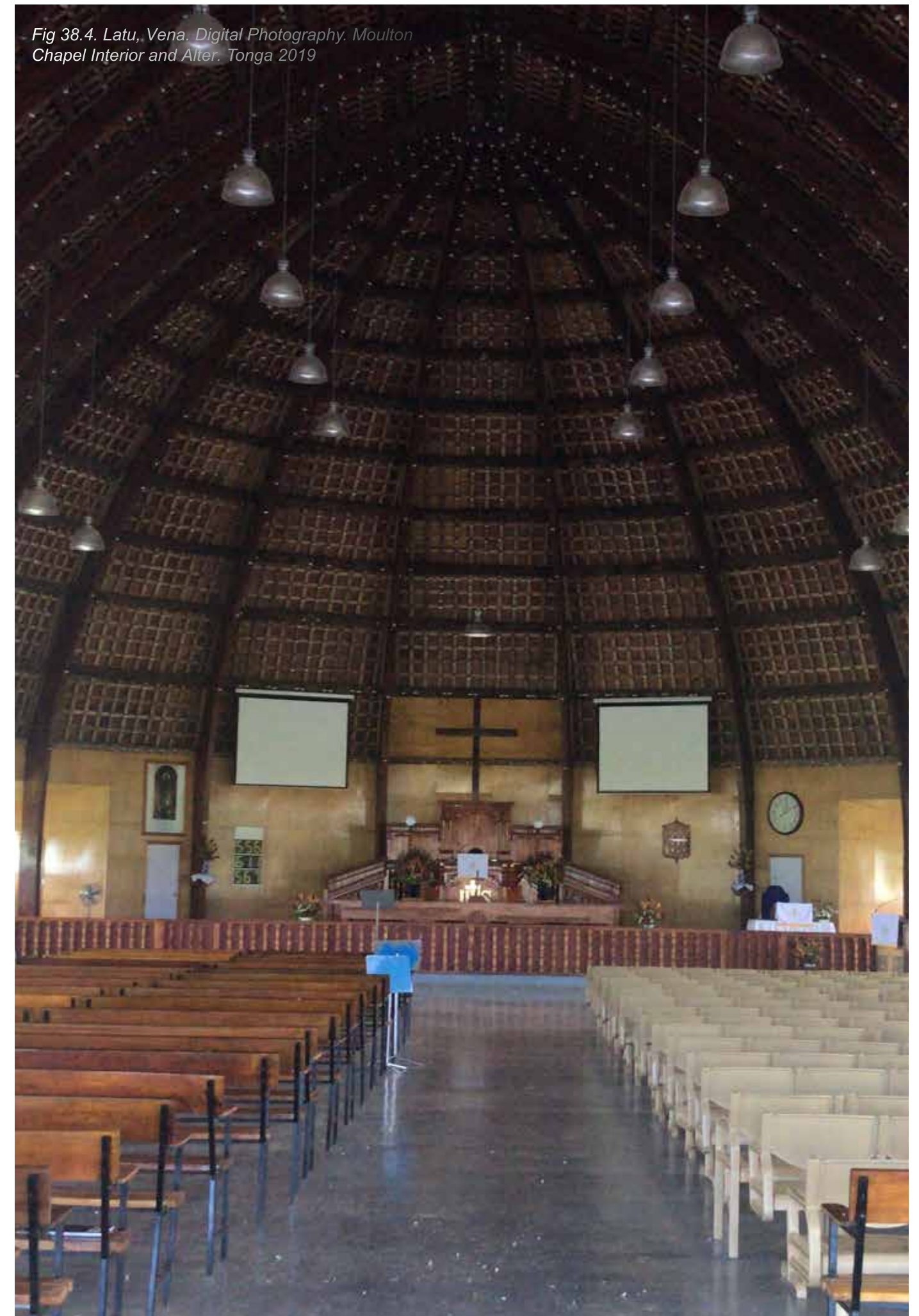
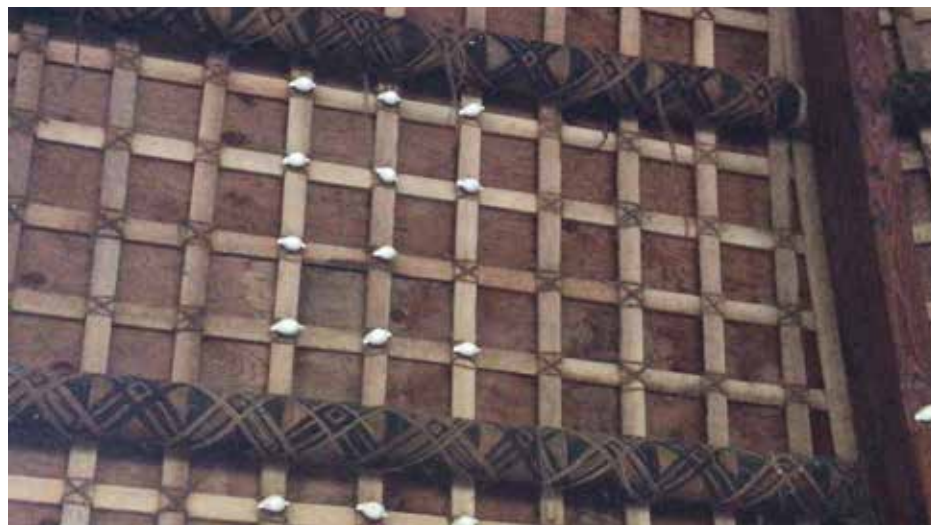


Fig 38.4. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Moulton Chapel Interior and Alter. Tonga 2019



Fig 39.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. The Sia'atoutai Theological College Chapel. Tonga. 2019



Fig 39.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. The Sia'atoutai Theological Chapel, Timber Framing and Thatching. Tonga. 2019



Fig 39.3. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. The Sia'atoutai Theological Chapel Lalava. Tonga. 2019

Fig 39.4. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. The Sia'atoutai Theological Chapel Lalava. Tonga. 2019





Fig 40.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Pelehake Lalava. 2019

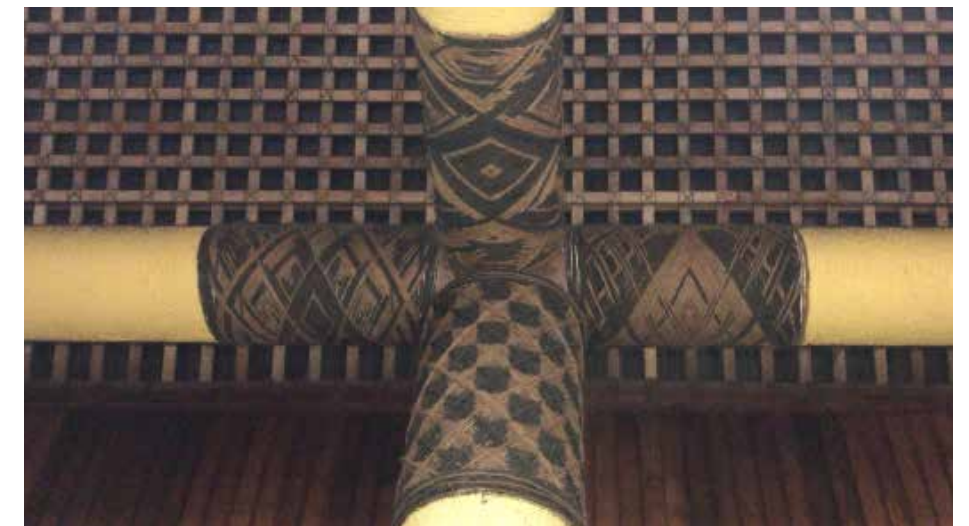


Fig 40.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Pelehake Lalava. 2019



Fig 40.3. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Pelehake Lalava. 2019

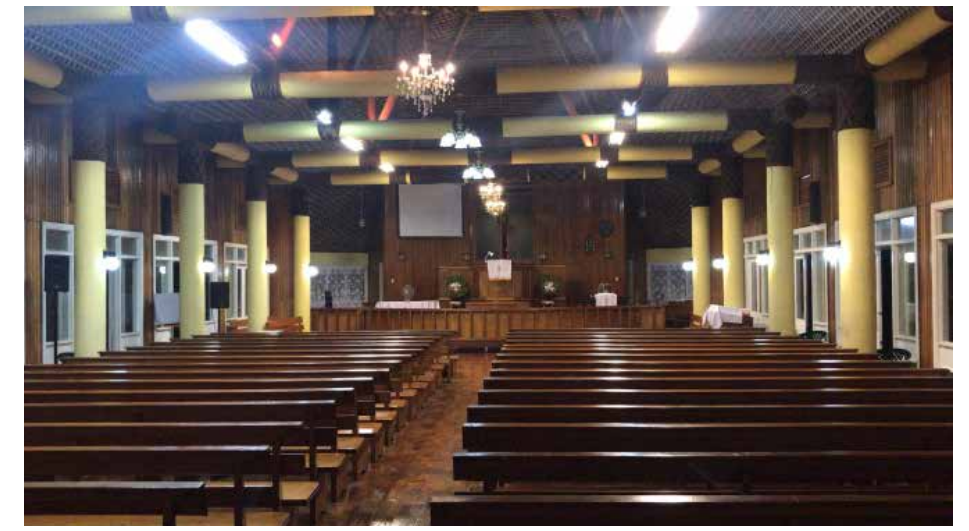
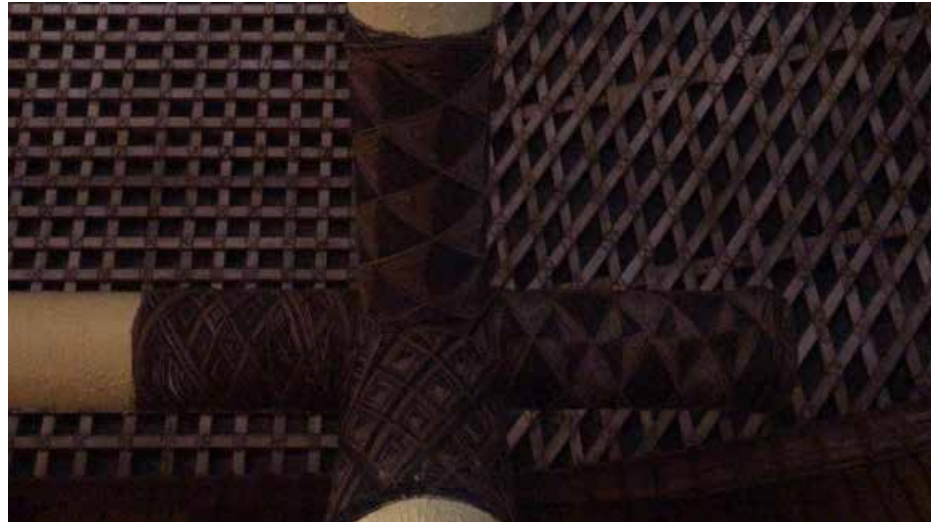


Fig 40.4. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Pelehake Lalava and Framing. 2019

Fig 41.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Basilica Sagato Anthony of Padua. Tonga. 2019



Fig 41.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Basilica Sagato Anthony of Padua Weaving of Timber Framing Joints. Tonga. 2019



*Fig 41.3 Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. Basilica Sagato
Anthony of Padua Interior. Tonga. 2019*

Fig 42.1. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. St Mary's Cathedral, Tonga (Ma'ufanga Cathedral or Cathedral of Nuku'alofa or Malia Tupu Imakulata). Tonga. 2019



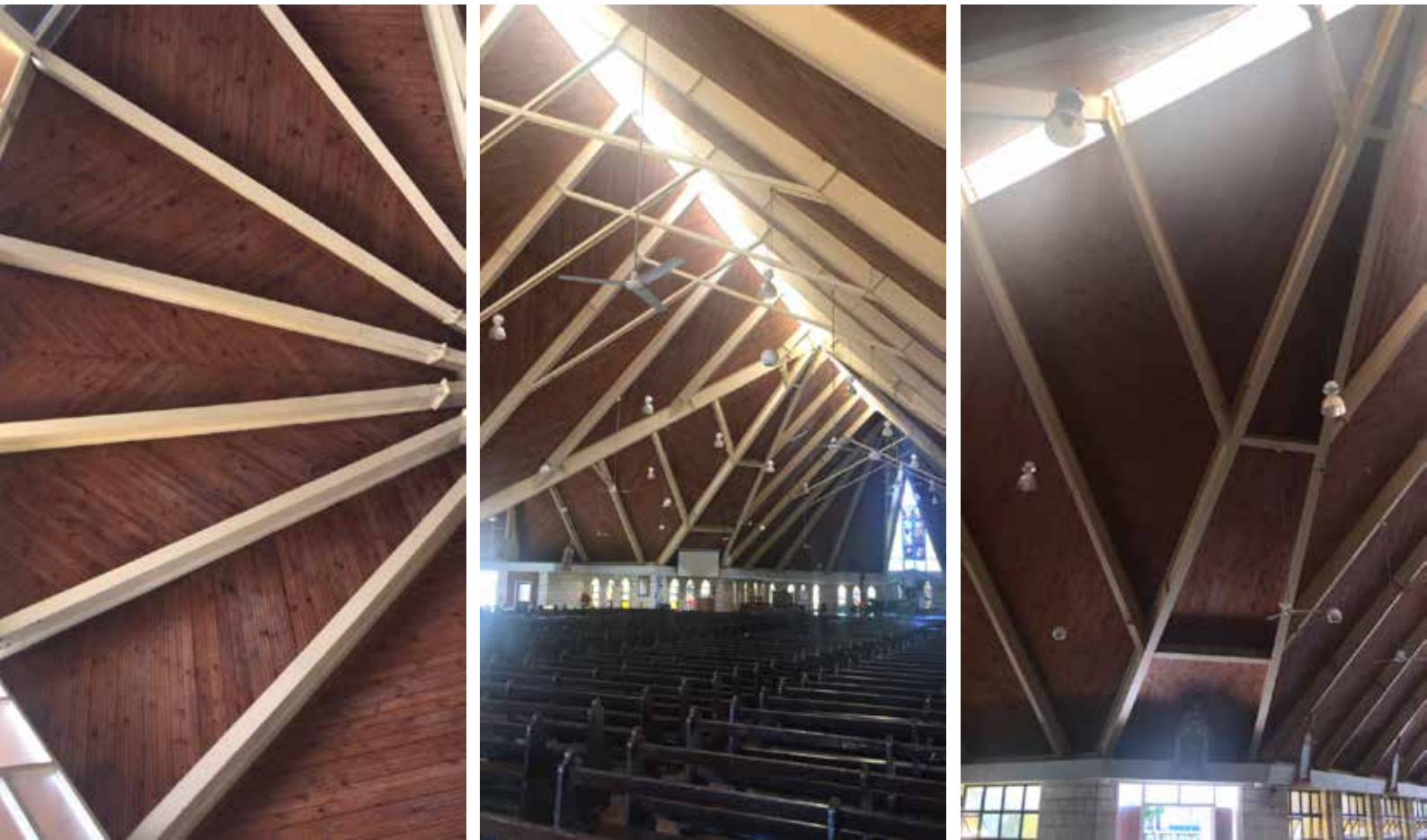
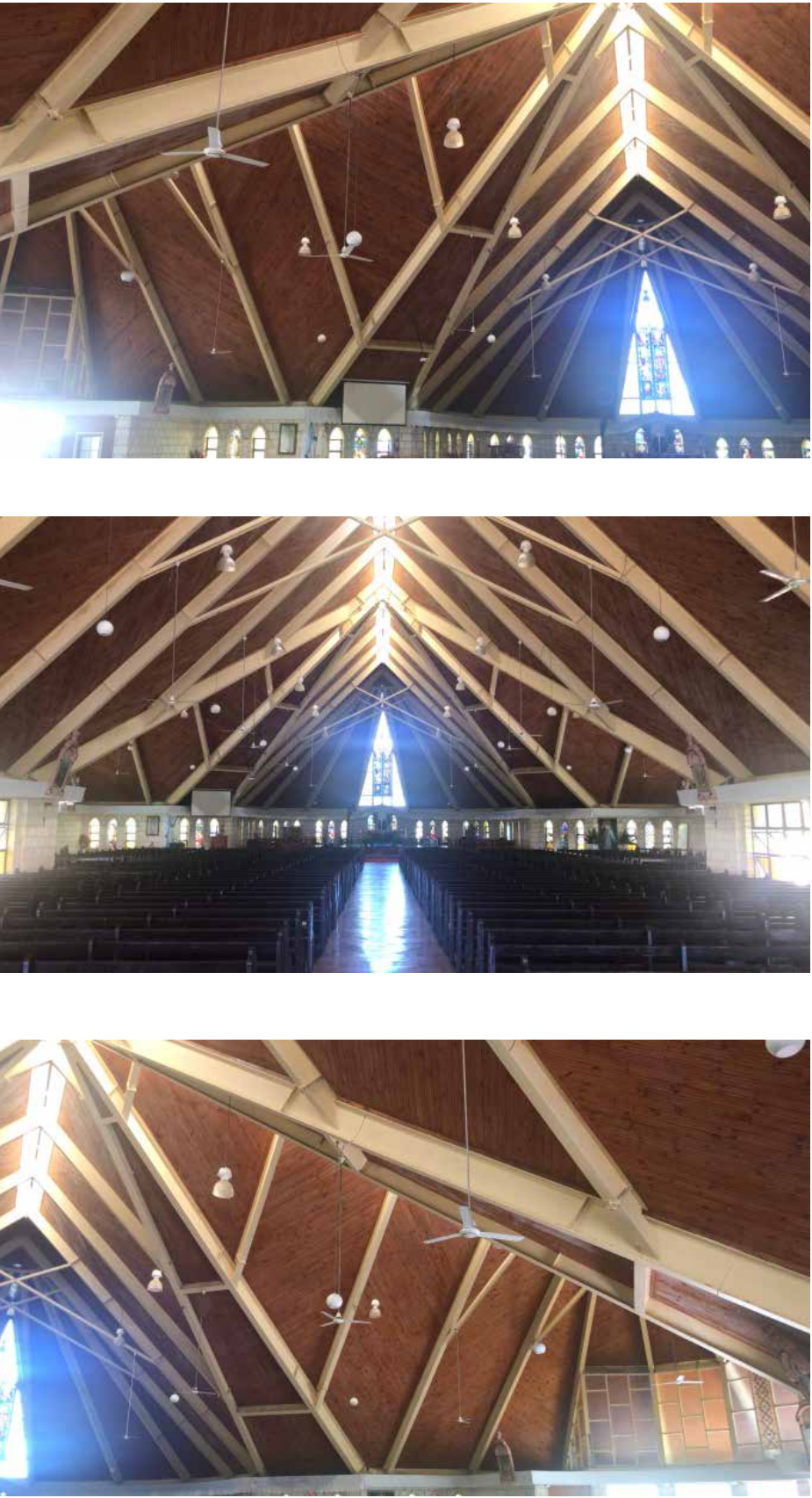


Fig 42.2. Latu, Vena. Digital Photography. St Mary's Cathedral, Tonga (Ma'ufanga Cathedral or Cathedral of Nuku'alofa or Malia Tupu Imakulata) Interior. Tonga. 2019



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